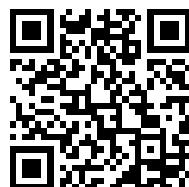

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"The land of the sky;"

Christian Reid



By Miss Frances C. Fisher.

Miss Luit Langen,

"THE LAND OF THE SKY;"

OR,

ADVENTURES IN MOUNTAIN BY-WAYS.

BY

CHRISTIAN REID, pseud.

Frances Christine (Fisher) Tiernan

AUTHOR OF "A QUESTION OF HONOR," "VALERIE AYLMER," "MORTON HOUSE,"
"NINA'S ATONEMENT," ETC.

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"THE LAND OF THE SKY;"
OR,
ADVENTURES IN MOUNTAIN BY-WAYS.



The Consultation.

CHAPTER I.

"Mountains that like giants stand,
To sentinel enchanted land."

"I WANT you all to remember," says Eric, decidedly, "that I do not advise you to go."

"I don't know how you can say that,

Eric," replies Aunt Markham, "when you have talked incessantly of the beauty of the mountains, and said that everybody ought to go to see them."

"He meant appreciative people," says Sylvia. "We are not appreciative; therefore his remarks do not apply to us."

"He wants to go alone with a gun and

a microscope," says Charley; "and has no fancy for playing cavalier-of-all-work to a trio of ladies."

"He need not fear any thing of that kind," I remark, "for you are going, and Rupert also. We shall, therefore, be well provided with cavaliers."

Scene: a family party on a veranda at sunset. Aunt Markham lying back in a large chair, fanning as if her existence depends on keeping cool—as perhaps it does, poor woman! since she weighs at least fourteen stone; Sylvia reclining in a smaller chair, with her filmy dress falling around her to the floor, her pretty face flushed with heat, her gray eyes slightly languid; Eric on the steps with his back against a jasmine-twined pillar, and a cigar, which he does not light, between his fingers; Charley Kenyon stretched on the grass just below the steps; Rupert hovering to and fro; I established in the hall-door, for the sake of a through-draught—the month being July, and the thermometer standing at eighty-five.

We have been discussing where we shall spend the months of August and September, and we have finally decided to turn our faces westward, and, crossing the Blue Ridge, explore as far as possible the comparatively unknown country which lies beyond—a country so elevated that its valleys lie more than two thousand feet above sea-level. The person by whose recommendation we decide on this programme is my cousin Eric Markham—a great hunter, a great lover of Nature, though outwardly the most unenthusiastic of human beings, a person whom his mother has never been able to drag to fashionable watering-places in her train, but who has spent summer after summer among the fair, wild, Carolina mountains, until his attachment to them is a family proverb.

"The reason why I don't advise you to go," he says, when our comments have ceased, "is because I have no doubt you will be bored and disgusted. You will find no fashionable hotels, no bands of music; and then you will blame me! So I accept no responsibility, but simply repeat what I have said before, that if you want fresh air and glorious scenery—the grandest this side of the Yosemite—you must go to Western North Carolina to find them."

"We want just those things," says Sylvia—Sylvia is my sister, and we are Aunt Mark-

ham's orphan nieces—"I am tired of dancing and flirting and toilets! What a comfort it will be to put on a linen traveling-dress and a pair of thick-soled shoes, such as Nora wore in 'Quits,' and set forth with an alpenstock to climb mountains."

"A great comfort indeed," says Charley, lazily.—Charley is Eric's cousin, but not ours; and he and Sylvia have been quarreling and making love and tormenting each other ever since their childhood.—"You will wish for your silk dresses before you have been gone three days. Eric talks as if you were going into the wilderness, but that country has been a resort for fifty years, perhaps longer, and Asheville is decidedly a civilized place. I was there last summer, and I had the pleasure of seeing a great deal of fashion."

"Then we must take our trunks," says Sylvia, alive to the importance of appearing as fashionable as her neighbors. "I thought we were only going to explore the mountains, but if we are likely to meet people—"

"Of course you must take your trunks, my dear," says Aunt Markham, decidedly. "One meets exceedingly nice people. Besides, it is always well to be prepared for emergencies."

"I shall take my gun," says Rupert, following Charley's example and flinging his long and rather awkward length of limb on the grass. It is impossible for any one *not* to be awkward who is six feet high and only seventeen years old.

"And is it definitely settled, then, that we will go to Western Carolina?" asks Sylvia. "All in favor of the motion please say 'Ay.' Very well," as a rather languid but unanimous "Ay" responds.—"Now, Eric, tell us how to reach it."

"There are two great gates of entrance," says Eric, "Swannanoa and Hickory-Nut Gaps. In the old time, when people traveled in their carriages, it was the general custom to cross the Blue Ridge by one gap in going to the transmontane country, and by the other in coming away.—You remember that, mother?"

"Certainly," answers Aunt Markham. "I went to Tennessee with your father thirty years ago, and we crossed the Hickory-Nut Gap in going, and Swannanoa in coming back."

"Let us go in that way," says Sylvia.

"Impossible," says Charley. "The railroad takes you to Swannanoa."

"A fig for the railroad! We can go in our carriage, like the grandees of thirty years ago. Which is the finest gap, Swannanoa or Hickory-Nut?"

"There is no comparison," says Eric. "Hickory-Nut is infinitely finer."

"Then we must see it," says Sylvia, decidedly. She is of a nature easily roused to enthusiasm, and it is evident that this enthusiasm is beginning to wake in the interest of the long-neglected beauty lying within our own borders. "Listen!" she says, sitting upright in her chair, "why can we not go by the railroad to Swannanoa Gap, and take the stage-coach from there to Asheville, leaving the carriage to follow us to the same place, so that we can travel where we like in the mountains, and finally return by Hickory-Nut Gap? Is not that a good plan, Eric?"

"Only open to the objection that the carriage will be likely to be broken to pieces," says Eric.

"Why, I have heard you say that the roads beyond the Blue Ridge are excellent."

"The turnpikes are generally excellent, but I humbly submit that all roads are not turnpikes; and, furthermore, that to reach the country beyond the Blue Ridge it is necessary to cross the mountains—to do which is no joke."

"I don't know a more serious matter," says Charley. "You are jolted, and bumped, and thumped, until you do not care for any prospect that can be shown to you."

"Pray speak for yourself," says Sylvia. "I am quite sure that no one else would think of putting a few jolts and thumps in comparison with the grandest scenery—"

"In the Atlantic States!" says Charley. "I have heard that from Eric several times. I contemplated this scenery on many occasions, and from many different places, with no great degree of satisfaction; but the trout-fishing—that is something which warrants enthusiasm!"

"And the hunting!" says Rupert, with an ecstatic smile on his sunburned face. "How many deer did you kill last season, Brother Eric?"

"About the carriage," says Aunt Markham, "I am inclined to think with Sylvia that it might be a good plan to send it to Asheville. The idea of traveling about the mountains in stage-coaches and hacks is insufferable!"

"But we are more than enough to fill the carriage," says Eric.

"Take two saddle-horses, also," cries Sylvia, with a bright light springing into her eyes. "One for you, and one for me—how delightful!"

"And how economical!"

She makes a gesture signifying that this consideration is not worth a moment's attention.

"People expect to spend money when they are traveling," she says, "and the cost of the whole expedition will be less than a month at a fashionable watering-place."

"And I'll take the horses along with the carriage," cries Rupert, eagerly. "The rest of you may go on the railroad if you like, but give me a horse forever!"

"John will drive the carriage, and you can ride Cecil and lead Bonnbelle," says Sylvia, with the air of a general issuing orders for a campaign.

"Eric, what do you say?" asks Aunt Markham, turning to her eldest son, who is autocrat of the household.

"What is left for me to say?" responds Eric, lighting his cigar. "The matter is apparently settled. I only desire that it may be clearly understood that I am not accountable for consequences. If the carriage is upset, and Bonnbelle breaks her own legs and Sylvia's neck, nobody is to blame me."

"Nobody will think of blaming you," says Sylvia. "You accompany us under protest—and such trifles as broken legs and necks are to be exclusively our own affair."

The next two weeks are devoted to preparing wardrobes and studying maps. Then, on a particularly warm Monday in August, we set forth on our journey. Rupert and John, with the carriage and horses, started the day before for Asheville, *via* Hickory-Nut Gap. We take the railroad, and turn our faces toward Swannanoa.

Our railroad-journey is uneventful, as railroad-journeys—unless varied by an accident—generally are. The cars are filled with the usual number of thirsty men and dusty women, of invalids, sight-seers, and pleasure-seekers. During the long pauses at the stations, we learn where most of these travelers are bound, and receive a great deal of interesting information about their social and domestic affairs. Few things strike one more forcibly in traveling than the general garru-

lity and egotism of human nature. This is entertaining for a time, but finally—taken in connection with a choking amount of dust, and a simmering degree of heat—it becomes almost intolerable. At last over the blazing noonday a grateful shadow steals, and, for the first time since early morning, we lift our window-blinds and look out. We are between the villages of Morganton and Marion, and fairly among the mountains. Already there is a greenness over the land, in striking contrast to the parched brownness of the low-country which we left behind; great hills roll up on all sides, and on our right the magnificent dark-blue masses of Table-Rock and Short-Off Mountain stand clearly defined against a lurid thunder-cloud. The road just here follows the lovely valley of the Catawba, and we see the river in the foreground, with its level meadow-lands, over which suddenly a white rain comes driving in a quick, sharp shower.

"I am sorry this gust has come up just now," says Eric. "I wanted to take you on the rear-platform of the car, and show you a very pretty view of the river-valley, with a glimpse of the Blue Ridge."

But we are not sorry, for the rain is delightful. It dashes in spray against our windows, peals of thunder sound above the clatter of the train, and flashes of lightning dart hither and thither to frighten nervous travelers. It does not continue very long, however. As suddenly as it began, the vehemence of the storm abates, the thunder rolls away, the cloud is evidently passing. A minute later a ray of sunshine falls on the scene, and lo! the earth is enchanted. The shower, which is still falling, is lighted up with prismatic radiance; away in the south dark clouds are piled, but around us all is freshness and beauty. Mists rise, like the white smoke of incense, and when we lift our windows a rush of odor enters—a hundred sweet scents of growing things mingled and exhaled by the dampness.

After this the run to Old Fort is very pleasant. The dust is laid, the heat is tempered, the sunshine is still partly obscured by clouds that dapple the changing landscape with soft shadows, and now and then we have a glimpse of blue heights far away. We pass beautiful valleys glittering with the late rain; we glide by grassy meadows, and streams where old-fashioned mills stand embowered

in trees. There is a shimmer over every thing—a mingling of mist and brilliance peculiar to a mountain-scene.

Presently our leisurely rate of speed abates, and we find ourselves at the end of our railroad journey—Old Fort. This place—which takes its name from an old fort that is supposed to have existed in the days of Indian warfare—has only risen to comparative importance since the railroad abruptly and unexpectedly ended here. At least the railroad track ends here, but for many miles beyond the road-bed is graded, and a great deal of heavy work in the way of bridging and tunneling is done, the sight of which moves one to fierce and futile indignation against the plunderers who have worked the people such grievous wrong.

"Is Old Fort a town?" asks Sylvia, looking round as we descend from the train.

"It is before you," says Charley. "Judge for yourself."

What is before us is an hotel perched on a hill. A few other houses are scattered widely and wildly around. Great wooded mountains rise in the background. The hotel-piazza seems crowded as we approach—Aunt Markham and Eric in front, Charley escorting Sylvia and myself. We are the last of the straggling procession of passengers, and receive the concentrated stares of all the languid ladies with yellow-backed novels in their hands and sundowns on their heads, all the open-eyed children, and lounging men.

"Why on earth do these people stay here?" asks Sylvia, struggling with a veil which she is trying to draw down. "It looks like a very uninteresting place."

"It is healthy, and the rates of board are, no doubt, cheap," says Charley. "Many of the people may also lack courage to cross the Gap—those being esteemed lucky who reach the other side whole of life and limb."

This appalling statement is treated with the incredulous contempt which it deserves as we mount the hotel-steps.

Hamlet says that "there's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so;" and this remark applies with peculiar force to Old Fort. Some people think it a very good place in which to spend weeks and months. Others are averse to spending more time there than the necessary hour which elapses between the arrival of the train and departure of the coach.

We belong to the latter class. After dinner we assemble on the piazza and take a vote for going or staying; and it is nearly unanimous to go.

"Catawba Falls are in the neighborhood," says Eric, anxious to fulfill his duties as *cicerone*. "If you stay until to-morrow you may see them, and they are well worth a visit."

"Stay a night—stay two nights—here!" says Aunt Markham. "It is impossible to think of such a thing!"

"Are the Falls easily reached?" asks Charley, with his usual air of protest against any exertion.

"They are by no means easily reached," answers Eric; "but they can be reached, which is the point, I take it."

"By no means," says Sylvia. "The point is to cross the Blue Ridge as soon as possible. Who cares for falls and cascades on *this* side? They may be pretty enough, but we are bound to the land of the sky—and yonder comes the coach to take us there. How splendid!"

It is not the coach which draws forth this commendation, but the six beautiful gray horses which are harnessed to it. We watch them admiringly, and Eric calls our attention to the manner in which they are controlled by their driver, who is no less a person than the renowned John Pence.

Of this famous character I have heard so much that I regard him with great interest. My knowledge of stage-drivers in real life being limited, I had drawn a fancy picture of a portly figure in top-boots and a "sprigged veskit;" instead, I see a spare, sinewy man, dark as an Indian, with the eye of a hawk, who wears a pair of the brownest and dirtiest of corduroy trousers, a striped shirt, the sleeves of which are rolled up above the elbows showing thin, muscular arms, and a hat slouched rakishly over his brow. This is John Pence, who for twenty years has driven back and forth over Swannanoa Gap, and whom his admirers declare to be the best driver on the continent. If success is the test of merit, merit certainly must be his; for during these twenty years no accident has ever happened to a coach driven by him; and those expert in such matters say that one hardly realizes the art of driving until one has seen him handle the ribbons.

That we have such a charioteer is a matter for congratulation, since the appearance

of the coach is not calculated to fill us with confident hopes of a safe journey. It is evidently old and much dilapidated. It is also heavily loaded. The boot is full of trunks,



John Pence.

and as many are piled on top as can possibly be put there. Besides which, Aunt Markham has the anguish of beholding her largest and most valuable one standing on the ground, while the proprietor of the house informs her that Mr. Pence says he is overloaded, and that trunk cannot possibly "go over the Gap this trip."

"Mr. Pence!" repeats the lady, indignantly. "Who is Mr. Pence, pray? My trunk *shall* go!—Eric, do you hear this?"

"I hear, mother," replies Eric, "but I don't think there is any redress. The coach *is* overloaded, and I should not consent for you to enter it as it stands if anybody but John Pence was going to drive. When you see the precipices past which that top-heavy vehicle must pass—"

"Oh!" she says, turning pale, "if that is the case, tell him to take off my other trunk, and Sylvia's and Alice's also."

But Sylvia and Alice protest against this, and a Babel of confusion follows. It is Eric who summarily ends it.

"Let me put you in the coach," he says. "Leave the trunks to me. I will arrange for them to be sent over safely to-morrow."

Then the labor of stowing us away begins. There are already an old lady, a middle-aged lady, two children, and an elderly gentleman, within the coach. By the united efforts of Eric, Charley, and the host, Aunt Markham is lifted and deposited inside. She sinks into her seat with an apoplectic "How fearful!"

I am lifted in next; but, when it comes to Sylvia's turn, that young lady declines to enter.

"I am going up aloft—like the cherub that watches over poor Jack," she says.—"I know *you* don't want me, Charley—you want to smoke. But Eric will take me with him—won't you, Eric?"

"I wonder if you think Eric doesn't want to smoke?" says Charley.

"He can if he chooses, and you, too, for that matter—so don't look so disconsolate, but help me over this wheel."

She is assisted over the wheel, and elevated to the deck-seat. Charley sits down by her side, Eric springs to a place by the driver, that illustrious person cracks his long whip, the six horses start with one accord, the heavy coach sways. "We are off.

"Over the Mountains of the Moon,
Down the valley of shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,
The shade replied,
If you seek for El Dorado."

This is what Charley sings to an improvised air, as we rattle down a steep hill and cross a clear, flashing, rocky-bottomed stream. The mountains which we are going to scale rise in towering masses before us—splendid heights that seem to defy the locomotive at their base. The gentleman who is our fellow-passenger points out some of the unfinished railroad-work. Aunt Markham looks at it regretfully.

"If only the road were finished to Asheville!" she says.

"No railroad in the country has been so mercilessly plundered, madam," says the gentleman, sternly. "Ever since the war, it has been in the hands of rogues and swindlers, who have stolen every thing but the road-bed—which could not conveniently be made away with."

"I should not be surprised if you were one of the defrauded contractors," I think;

but there is not much opportunity for conversation on the great grievance of Western North Carolina. We have begun the ascent of the mountain, and to say that the road is stony would convey but a poor idea of its actual state. It is my settled conviction that no one knows what stones really are until he or she has traveled from Old Fort to the top of the Blue Ridge. The road is covered with them, of every size, shape, and variety, and the constant rolling, jolting, and pitching of the coach baffle description. A ship at sea in a stiff gale is steady compared to it. We settle ourselves grimly to our fate; endeavor to keep ourselves steady by straps or any thing else that is convenient; gasp a brief "Excuse me!" when we are hurled against each other; and, in the intervals of being tossed about the coach, lean out of the windows to admire the wild beauty which surrounds us. At least I do. Nobody else pays much attention to it. Aunt Markham resigns herself to martyr-like endurance, and preserves a martyr-like silence, until a tremendous lurch, which knocks her bonnet out of shape, also exhausts her patience.

"Alice," she says, severely, "if I had entertained an idea of any thing like this, *nothing* would have induced me to come."

"There's worse than this afore us," remarks the old lady, placidly. "I've been over the Gap times and times—for my daughter's married and living in Buncombe—and my bones always ache for about three weeks afterward."

"If nothing happens worse than a few jolts," says the gentleman, "we can stand them well enough, but I don't like the look of this stage. I told Burgin before we left Old Fort that it was a shame to send travelers over the Gap in such a conveyance. He said it had been sent from Asheville. I don't believe it will go back there without an accident."

"Good Heavens!" says Aunt Markham, turning pale, as she remembers all that she has heard of the precipices that border the road. "If I had suspected that the coach was not safe, I would never have entered it.—Alice, speak to Eric at once.—Dear me! what is that?"

Chorus of children. "O ma, did you hear something crack?"

Something undoubtedly cracked—and that loudly—under the body of the vehicle. A convulsive swaying and jerking is followed

by an abrupt halt and the descent of Mr. Pence himself. Clamor immediately ensues. All the passengers thrust their heads out of the windows and request to be told what is the matter. Mr. Pence deigns no reply to their inquiries, but he says a few words to Eric—who has also descended from the top. The latter at once opens the door and tells us that we must alight.

"A brace has broken," he says. "Mr. Pence is going to send to Old Fort for assistance to mend it—when the assistance comes, the coach has to be lifted forward, so you must all get out."

Remonstrance being useless, we are lifted down and set on our feet. Sylvia, assisted by Charley, descends like a bird from her

"Not with John Pence at the helm, mother," says Eric; "the thing is impossible.—Now, while we have to wait, suppose you come and look at the tunnel a little farther on. It is an exceedingly interesting piece of work."

But Aunt Markham does not care for tunnels, and she declines to go. So we leave her seated on a bundle of shawls and waterproofs, while we follow Sylvia and Charley, who have already walked on in the direction of the interesting piece of work. When we come in sight of the tunnel they are just entering it, and by the time we reach it we see their figures at the farther end, clearly defined against the light.

"I have a peculiar horror of these places,"



The Break-down.

lofty perch—she has a faculty of doing things gracefully which other women do awkwardly. Our prophet of evil scrambles out, and pokes his stick, with an air of triumph, under the body of the coach.

"I said this stage was unsafe as soon as I saw it," he remarks. "It is fortunate that the brace broke just here. If the accident had occurred by one of the precipices a little farther on we should all, madam" (this to Aunt Markham), "have lost our lives."

"I never heard any thing more infamous!" says Aunt Markham, who does not hesitate to use strong terms. "This What's-his-name ought never to be allowed to drive a coach again. The idea of risking our lives!—Eric, do you hear this? We might have been dashed over a precipice and—"

I say, as we enter, and Eric points out the admirable masonry. "I never feel nervous in traveling except when passing through a tunnel; but then I always think, 'Suppose a collision should occur, and we should be crushed in the *débris* of a wrecked train down here in the bowels of the earth!'"

"What a cheerful reflection!" says Eric. "You will be particularly partial to traveling on this road when it is completed, for there are three tunnels just here—two short ones, and one very long one through the Blue Ridge."

"I certainly prefer going over it with John Pence and his six gray horses to burrowing under it like a mole. By-the-by, if the railroad ever should be finished, what will become of John Pence?"

"He will break his heart and die, I suppose."

Midway in the tunnel we meet Sylvia and Charley. We turn and go back with them. From Point Tunnel, looking east, there is a very beautiful, though not very extended, view; and we sit down near the mouth of the tunnel to admire it, while we wait for the coach. Giant hills, clothed to their crest with verdure, rise around us. The road winds like a thread along the side of the mountain on our left, a green valley lies below, golden sunshine glints down through leaves to which diamond-drops of rain still cling, stillness encompasses us—when our voices cease we hear nothing save the sweet singing of waters in the forest-recesses and the notes of birds. Sylvia makes a pretty adjunct to the picture as she sits in her gray dress and blue veil on a pile of stones, arranging some ferns which she has gathered. Charley, as usual, is lying at her feet, regardless of the fact that the grass is very damp. I open my sketch-book, and make a hurried outline of the scene, writing underneath, "*En route to Arcadia!*"

By the time this is finished the coach appears, and, as it halts, Aunt Markham's fan is seen at the window beckoning imperatively.

"This gentleman says the road is frightfully dangerous," she remarks, when we come up, "and the coach is certainly very unsafe. There is no telling when we shall reach Asheville, or whether we shall reach there at all. We can only trust in Providence."

Some people grow pious whenever they are frightened. Aunt Markham is one of them. She never alludes to Providence unless she desires substantial aid from that quarter.

Eric laughs.

"Trust in John Pence, too, mother," he says. "You may be sure he will take you safely to Asheville."

After this the ascent begins in earnest. The road is almost perpendicular, and so narrow that there is barely room for the coach. On one side the mountain rises in a sheer cliff, on the other are precipices, down which the gaze is lost in twilight. At least once in every half-mile we ford a stream of considerable size, while innumerable rivulets cross our way. There is no point in our upward journey where we miss the music of flowing

water. Clear as crystal and cold as ice, these streams come leaping in cascades down the rocky glens, flash along our path, bordered by ferns, shadowed by laurel and ivy, and at last plunge into the tangled greenness of the depths far below. It is impossible to write, in terms which will not seem extravagant, of the forest which covers the great mountains towering across the gorge. The evergreens especially attract our notice and admiration. We see familiar shrubs grown to stately trees, and trees to giants. The spruce-pine, here in its native air, towers to an almost incredible height, the hemlock, the white-pine, the "bonny ivy-tree," the holly, and mountain-laurel—what words can describe the beauty of these, mingled with the lighter foliage of the oak, the chestnut, the maple, the ash, and countless others? Beautiful berries gleam, strange wild-flowers shine like stars, ferns run riot in luxuriance, velvet-like mosses cover every rock and fallen tree.

Up, still up we go, as if we meant to pierce the very clouds. The horses strain, the coach sways, the air grows fresher; in the great shadow of the hills we forget the sultry heat of August lying over the parched country below. We feel that we are on our way to the land of the sky. I say as much to Aunt Markham, who resignedly expresses a hope that we may reach it. After a while the children, who have been devouring large slices of cake, cry out for water, and Mr. Pence obligingly stops by a spring that gushes out at the foot of a gray rock. Eric descends also, and asks for a cup.

"You must all drink," he says, "for this is the head of the Catawba River. A few miles from here, on the other side of the Ridge, is a spring which is called the head of the Swannanoa, so that in the course of one afternoon you can drink from the fountains of two rivers—one of which is bound to the Atlantic Ocean, the other to the Gulf of Mexico."

"Dear me!" says the old lady, "to think of their traveling so far! But I always thought the Swannanoa emptied into the French Broad."

"This is a beautiful place, Eric," I say, hastily, looking at the narrow defile in which the coach stands, the escarpment of the bold cliff leaning over us, the green abyss on the other side, beyond which mountains hem the

gap. "I wonder if Mr. Pence would not stop long enough for me to sketch it?"

"Impossible," answers Eric. "We have been so much delayed that I doubt if we shall reach Asheville before midnight."

Aunt Markham groans at this. "I shall be dead!" she says. "I cannot endure this terrible jolting much longer."

Despite this dismal prophecy, we go on—higher and yet higher. Now and then, glancing backward, we catch glimpses of the world below—an azure sea broken into a hundred giant billows—and feel that it is pleasant to be exalted so far above it. These glimpses, however, are very brief. We struggle upward for another weary hour. Then comes a sudden halt, and Eric cries:

"Look!"

We look. For one minute we grasp such a perfect pleasure as does not often come in this imperfect world. The arduous part of our journey is over; we are on the top of the Blue Ridge; looking back down the mountain up which we have for three hours so laboriously climbed, we see the country we are leaving spread out in the beauty of blue, misty distance. The afternoon is clear and golden, the air of this great altitude inexpressibly pure and fresh. The shower at noon has left the day like crystal; and turning eastward the glance sweeps over an infinite expanse of broken country, range after range of mountains melting into each other, high, cultivated valleys lying between, soft cloud-shadows falling in patches here and there, bold outlines against the farthest distance, the graceful line of heavenly-looking hills melting into the horizon, and over all the refulgent glory of the sapphire sky.

We are now on the summit of Swannanoa Gap, and from this point begins that gradual descent which will bring us to the elevated basin in which Asheville lies. At "Curley's" we change horses and drivers, and not far from here meet the coach from Asheville. It is obtrusively bright and new in appearance. The inside is lined with crimson plush—in contrast to our faded leather—and on the seats three fresh and cheerful-looking ladies sit. Two gentlemen are on the top. They all stare at us—we return the compliment. The driver jeeringly tells our driver that he is not likely to reach Asheville before morning—to which the latter replies that

he will be there by ten o'clock. With this interchange of civilities we part.

"How odiously complacent those people looked!" says Sylvia. "I am glad they have to go down that steep mountain."

As we advance, the path widens, the mountains recede; dells, and coves, and sweeps of cultivated land appear; now and then we see a farm-house in some sheltered nook, looking very diminutive in the shadow of the hills. Already the aspect of every thing is changed. A greenness like that of early spring is spread over the land; there is a sense of freedom, of freshness and repose, in the pure air. It is Arcadia which we have entered, and which lies around us, serene and peaceful in the long light and deep, slanting shadows of the afternoon.

Presently Sylvia's voice is heard asking if we do not want some information. "Eric is a walking guide-book," she says, "and he has been telling me all about the country. We have crossed the Blue Ridge and left it behind, you know. These mountains on each side of us now are spurs of that chain—those on the left are called the hills of the Swannanoa, these on the right belong to the Black Mountain range. Eric says that in a little while we shall see the Black itself."

"*Vive le roi!*" I answer. "The Black is 'the monarch of mountains'—at least the monarch of Atlantic mountains. One cares nothing about those enormous and no doubt ugly peaks in the West."

"There is very good philosophy in valuing what we have, and despising what we have not," says Eric. "Yonder is the Black now! Look, what a fine peak!"

"Very fine, indeed!" says Aunt Markham, gazing out of the wrong side of the coach and nodding approvingly at one of the hills of the Swannanoa.

But I see what Eric means. Indeed if he had not spoken I think I should have known that the magnificent crest upthrust against the evening sky could only be the chief of Appalachian mountains. Shall I ever forget that first sight of its majestic beauty? Its splendid peaks were outlined with massive distinctness, and its dark-blue sides were purpling in the light of a luminous sunset. Round the pinnacle a few light clouds were floating, which caught the golden radiance of the west.

"Those form the monarch's crown," says

Eric. "It is rare to see the peaks of the Black free from clouds."

Besides the Black, there are other mountains — part of the same range — in sight. Nothing can be more superb than the great lines of Craggy as they trend westward. Its peaks, to the unscientific eye, look as high as the cloud-girt pinnacle of its mighty neighbor, and their effect is nearly as grand. That we see this beautiful range at sunset seems to us a very gracious boon of Fate. Magical shades of color melt and blend into each other as the nearer and farthest heights change their hues with the changing light. Finally a soft mist, neither blue nor purple, but something between the two, begins to steal over them, and deepen in all the clefts and gorges, as if they were drawing their robes about them for the night.

It is not long that we have this view. The road turns, other mountains intervene, and we find ourselves facing a great pomp of sunset. In the midst of it rises, like a dream of the celestial country, a glorified azure peak of exquisite symmetry, and Eric says, "Pisgah!"

Presently the sunset fades, and twilight softly melts into moonlight. All along their dark crests the mountains are touched with

on, but the night grows more and more beautiful. We cross again and again a swift, bright stream, which we are told is the Swannanoa, and at last we find ourselves journeying along its banks. Is this an enchanted land of pastoral delight to which we have come? It is impossible not to believe so. Fertile fields and softly swelling hills surround us; houses gleam in the moonlight; the level road over which even the coach rolls smoothly is immediately on the river-bank. We see the current rippling and swirling over its rocky bed with a music which fills all the lustrous night with sweetness. Lovely depths of foliage—drooping trees and tangled vines—fringe its banks. Nothing can be conceived more fairy-like than this charming river. Though I am growing very sleepy, I cannot refrain from expressing my admiration, and the gentleman by my side begins to explain that "Swannanoa" does not mean "beautiful," but "great road, or pass, over the mountains." I listen with disgusted incredulity, and before he concludes have fallen asleep, indifferent to the fact that it is the hard wood of the coach against which my head rests.

When I wake we are entering Asheville.



Asheville.

silver, while the pearly radiance bathes valley, and rock, and stream, with a flood of enchantment. The coach and the hours drag slowly

The coach is rattling up a long, stony street, lights are gleaming, and there seems a great deal of movement about. Our journey is at

an end, and with a sense of grateful repose we soon lie down to sleep, waiting for the morning to show us what manner of place this is which we have entered in the still, bright beauty of an August midnight.

CHAPTER II.

"Wandering as in a magic dream,
By shadowy wood and crystal stream,
By mountain-peak and forest-dell,
Where fauns and fairies love to dwell,
We enter the enchanted clime,
Forgotten in the lapse of time,
The golden land of fair idlesse,
Of sylvan sports and joyousness."



A DAY of summer warmth, yet with a stimulating quality in the air

unlike the languid heat we left below, a cloudless sky, a flood of sunshine, a sparkling mist draping the distant azure mountains—this is the aspect with which Buncombe greets the strangers within her borders when they open their windows the next morning.

These windows look down on the Main

Street, but there is room and to spare in Asheville, so we are not hedged in by buildings. Immediately in front is an open space through which we look at the green hills on which the town is built, rising with gentle, undulating swell in every direction, while afar lie the blue mountains, height overtopping height, peak rising behind peak, graceful lines blending, through the gaps more remote ranges to be seen lying so pale and faint on the horizon that it is almost impossible to tell where mountains end and sky begins. It is only a glimpse of the beauty which is in store for us, yet we are delighted. There is a brilliancy about the scene which is almost startling. We were not prepared for

such clear, exquisite colors—colors that would thrill an artist's inmost soul—such emerald greenness, such heavenly blueness, such diamond-like brightness of atmosphere.

"It is a country of which to dream!" cries Sylvia, clasping her hands.

"Why have we never come here before? Why have we gone everywhere else, and neglected this Arcadia lying at our very door?"

"In order that we might be fitted to appreciate it when we did come," I reply. "We are now able to compare it—unbiased by any spell of earthly association—with much more famous regions, and to declare that it surpasses them all."

"Surpasses them!—I should think so, indeed! Have you ever seen anywhere else such tints as those on the mountains yonder? Come! I see a piazza—let us go out on it. One cannot have too much of this air. It is like an elixir of life."

We go out on the piazza. The air is indeed like an elixir in its buoyancy and lightness. Birds are singing in the leafy depths of the trees that droop before the hotel, people are passing up and down the street—among them we presently recognize Eric,

walking with a more elastic step than is customary with him in the low-country. Macgregor's foot is plainly on his native heath. He stops to shake hands with every other person whom he meets, and there is much cordiality in these greetings. Sylvia watches him with amused eyes. When he passes under the piazza she leans over and speaks :

"What is the Arcadian form of salutation, Eric? Shall one say 'God save you!' or 'The top of the morning?' Isn't it delicious—the country, I mean? Alice and I are here. Come up."

"You had better come down," he says. "The breakfast-bell is ringing. I will meet you in the parlor in five minutes."

In five minutes we meet in that apartment. Aunt Markham has declined to rise for breakfast, and reports that she is aching in every limb from the trying passage of Swannanoa Gap. "I don't know when I shall recover," she says, solemnly. Charley is always incorrigibly lazy, therefore it follows that we go in to breakfast attended by Eric alone.

It is the height of the season for tourists, and we hear—in fact, we heard before we crossed the mountains—that every house of entertainment in Asheville is crowded. The "Eagle" demurred about receiving us, but Eric's influence carried our point. This morning we see that the hotel is full to overflowing. As we eat our breakfast leisurely, we criticise the parties that come and go, and are edified by a great deal of fashion. After a while Charley appears, and drops into a seat by Sylvia.

"I see no signs of the linen blouse, the alpenstock, or the thick boots," he says, regarding her pretty toilet with evident appreciation. "Are we going to resign the rôle of explorers, and subside into ordinary summer idlers?"

"I have not the faintest idea what *you* mean to do," she replies, "but, judging by the manner in which you begin the campaign, I should think you were likely to be more of a summer idler than any thing else. As for the rest of us, we have arranged our plan of action for the day. After breakfast we are going to devote ourselves to seeing Asheville and the French Broad. This afternoon we shall walk to—to—what is the name of the place, Eric?"

"Beaucatcher," answers Eric.

"And to-night let us go to Elk Mountain," says Charley, meekly. "It is only about seven miles distant—a pleasant point for a moonlight stroll."

"No, to-night we are going to—what is the name of *that* place, Eric?"

"Battery Porter," says Eric.

"Yes, and then to-morrow we are going to MacSomebody's Hill—Eric says it commands the finest view east of the Mississippi—and the day after to Elk Mountain, and the day after that—"

But the expression of Charley's face is so full of genuine consternation that I interpose.

"Pray spare us, Sylvia. We are not making the tour of Europe after the manner of Brown, Jones, and Robinson—the greatest amount of sight-seeing to be accomplished in the smallest deal of time. We *are* summer idlers, and we do not mean to exhaust ourselves by making a business of pleasure. Don't let us be tied down to a programme. Let us see all these beautiful places in the manner and at the time that seems to us best."

"Hear! hear!" says Charley, gratefully—but Sylvia regards me with disapprobation.

"We are not likely to see very much if the manner and the time are left to some of the party," she remarks.

"May I be allowed to suggest riding or driving, instead of walking?" says Charley. "Asheville is a town of magnificent distances—every place is a mile at least from every other place—and the French Broad, which you speak of seeing, is a mile from them all."

"What are miles in this climate?" asks Sylvia, loftily.

After breakfast we set forth to discover what miles are in this climate, and we find them quite as long as those to which we have been accustomed. Charley is right. Asheville is a place of magnificent distances, and if it is ever built up within its corporate limits, it will be the metropolis which its inhabitants fondly hope to see it. Yet as we stroll around and about (or, to speak more correctly, up and down the streets), we decide that one could hardly under any circumstances wish it other than it is—less a town than a collection of country-seats scattered irregularly and picturesquely over the innumerable

hills. There is no point from which the eye does not command a great expanse of country and mountain-ranges overtopped by mountain-ranges, besides the most charming bits of foreground landscape. As a rule, I dislike comparisons in scenery—especially comparisons which introduce Switzerland—but it is impossible to refrain from saying that in general effect Asheville reminds one of a Swiss town. The green heights over which the gabled houses are scattered, the roads winding away to the breezy uplands, the air of brightness and cleanliness, the winsome glades and valleys, and the frame of distant mountains—so soft, so graceful, so heavenly fair, that it is impossible to wish their violet outlines transformed to the dazzling majesty of the pure, awful Alpine peaks.

"Now," says Eric, as with much expenditure of breath we gain the top of the beautiful hill on which the Catholic church stands—decidedly the loveliest site in the town—"you can see how Asheville is situated. You perceive that the hills on which it is built rise up from the valleys of the French Broad and Swannanoa—"

"How can we perceive it?" demands Sylvia. "Neither the French Broad nor the Swannanoa is visible. It is a matter of faith, not sight, so far as *they* are concerned. I see the hills—and they are astonishingly green."

"West of the Blue Ridge the famous blue grass grows—which makes Western North Carolina one of the finest grazing regions in the world," says Charley, who is seated in the church-door, fanning himself with his straw hat. He utters this item of information with an air which seems to say that Eric shall not monopolize all the honors of ciceroneship.

"And what are those?—and those?—and those?" asks Sylvia, indicating various peaks in the beautiful mountain panorama spread toward the south and west.

"Those at which you are looking," says Eric, "belong to the range of the Cold Mountain—and that most prominent peak is Pisgah. Its shape and height make it a landmark through all the country south of the Black."

We can well credit this, looking at Pisgah with admiring eyes. It lifts its head boldly, this commanding pyramid, from among a number of lesser peaks, the lines

of which recede away on each side until they lie like azure clouds on the far horizon.

"From Beaucatcher, yonder," says Eric, pointing to a bold hill—the last of a spur running down from the Black—which bounds the prospect on the east, "there is a most extensive view. One hundred and eighty peaks are said to be in sight. I never counted them—but I can believe it."

"Let us go there at once," says Sylvia.

A faint groan proceeds from Charley in the rear.

"Not this morning," I say. "Let us go there for the sunset. Now we are bound to the French Broad."

Charley groans again—evidently this is not much of an improvement in Beaucatcher—but he rises and we descend the hill. A steep street runs along its base. We climb this for some distance, and presently find ourselves in a shady lane, with a stretch of meadow-land before us, and several country-seats in sight.

"What a charming place!" says Sylvia, sitting down on the roots of a great oak by the road-side to rest. "We are in the country, and yet not in the country. Alice, had you any idea that Asheville would be like this?"

"Not the least," I answer, looking beyond green meadows and wooded hills to the shadows moving across the distant mountains.

"How confidently one draws a mental picture of a place and accepts it for reality!" Sylvia goes on, tracing figures in the sand with the point of her parasol. "I fancied we should find an ordinary village—rather pretty, perhaps—but chiefly remarkable for being twenty-two hundred feet above the sea—"

"Twenty-two hundred and fifty," says Charley. "The people insist on having the credit of every fraction."

"Good as a health-resort, no doubt," Sylvia proceeds, "but full of the depressing village air and village stagnation one knows so well. Instead, I look round, and what do I see?"

"Mountains," says Eric, literally.

"A bright little spa," the young lady announces, emphatically, "which only needs fashion to make it an American Baden."

"I hope it may be a long time before fashion finds it," says Eric, dryly.

"Then you must hope that it may be a long time before there is a railroad," I say. "One cannot expect to keep Fashion out when once steam has opened the way for her capricious majesty."

"The place, even now," says Charley, "might be a great summer-resort—counting its visitors by thousands, instead of by hundreds—if it would arouse to a sense of its own interest, and provide a proper place to lodge them.* A modern hotel, with fine grounds—"

"And a band of music," says Sylvia.

"Of course a band of music, a good table, and good servants, would realize your American Baden in short order."

"You are fine Arcadians," I remark, severely, "to plan deliberately the destruction of all you profess to admire. If I had Mr. Ruskin's gift of invective, I would wither you with my indignation. Not having it, I exult in the fact that you can neither build your hotel, nor bring your bands of music and army of tourists."

"The railway will bring them, however," says Sylvia, beginning to hum a Strauss waltz.

At this moment a carriage appears driving along the lane. It is a small basket-phaeton, drawn by a large horse, instead of a pony, and contains a lady and a gentleman. The wheels roll smoothly and easily over the shadow-dappled road; the lady holds her fringed parasol with coquettish grace; the sound of their gay voices floats to us. We begin to walk on, but Sylvia looks round. "After all, driving is pleasanter than walking," she says.

"Are you tired?" says Charley. "Take my arm."

Before she can accept or decline this civility, an exclamation is heard from the phaeton. "*Ciel!*" cries a voice with a French accent, "is not that Sylvia Norwood? I am sure it must be!—Victor, stop—stop a moment!"

"But you are not sure, Adèle," a man's voice remonstrates.

"I must make sure," replies the other, eagerly.

Then the tall horse is induced to stop, and we look at Sylvia. She turns toward the phaeton, and, as the lady springs lightly to

the ground, advances, and holds out her hand. "You are Adèle Dupont," she says. "I am very glad to meet you."

"It is—it is herself!" cries Miss Dupont, rushing forward, and embracing her with effusion.

In the effort to refrain from smiling—knowing that the eyes of the gentleman in the phaeton are upon us—we all look so grave that one might suppose something very sad to be occurring. In reality I am much amused. I have heard of Miss Dupont—a creole, from New Orleans, with whom Sylvia was at school—and I know that the encounter is not altogether agreeable to the latter. She puts what is popularly known as "a good face" on the matter, however, and, when the embraces and kisses subside, says:

"How singular that we should meet here, Adèle! Where do you come from?"

"From the Warm Springs," answers Adèle. "We reached there a month ago, and I should have been content to stay until it was time to go back to New Orleans, but some of our party wanted to travel. We arrived here day before yesterday. We are going—oh, everywhere! And you?"

"I reached here with a party, last night. The length of our stay is indefinite—our plans are indefinite, also. Here is my sister, let me introduce you."

Miss Dupont is introduced to me, Eric is presented, also Charley. She says something graceful and flattering to each of us—being, evidently, one of the persons whose ease and readiness, especially in the line of compliments, make less-favored people feel stiff and awkward. Then she turns to Sylvia:

"Now that you have made me acquainted with your sister and cousins," she says, "I must introduce my brother to you.—Victor, can you leave the horse for a few minutes?"

Victor does so readily enough. He is a slender, dark-eyed man, with a great deal of French grace in his manner. He is thirty, perhaps, and looks interesting and artistic. I see Charley (who is neither dark-eyed, interesting, nor artistic) regard him with evident disfavor. Eric is more cordial, and, while he and Sylvia talk to the stranger, Miss Dupont informs me, in a dramatic aside, that he is a charming musician, that he has been a gallant soldier, and that "we"—the Dupont family understood—are most proud of and devoted to him.

* Since this party were in Asheville, a "proper place" has been provided.

"But where are you all going?" she asks, suddenly turning her attention from me to Charley, in a manner for which I am not entirely unprepared. "Victor and I have been driving aimlessly. Is there any special place to go to? Is there any particular thing to be seen?"

Now, Adèle Dupont is by no means a very pretty woman, but she is a woman who makes the best of her personal appearance, and who has a grace and style that would redeem ugliness itself. She is attractive and beguiling. She knows it, and Charley knows it, too.

"There are several places," he replies. "Have you been to Beaucatcher? Have you driven out to the Swannanoa—or the French Broad?"

"We came up the French Broad, you know. As for Beaucatcher—no, I have not seen it, nor the Swannanoa."

"We were just on our way to Beaucatcher," says Mr. Dupont to Sylvia.

"You had better wait until this afternoon, and join our party," says Eric, good-naturedly. "We are going there to see the sunset."

"Yes, of course we will wait," says Miss Dupont, graciously. "If Victor and I went alone, we should not know one mountain from another; but no doubt *you*"—the beguiling eyes again appeal to Charley—"know the names of them all."

"Not quite," replies Charley, modestly—he really does not know a single mountain besides Pisgah, which, from its shape, is unmistakable—"but I will do my best to enlighten you."

With this arrangement we separate. The Duponts return to their phaeton. We continue our walk, discussing them the while—not altogether in a spirit of charity.

"Adèle Dupont is delightful until you find that she is insincere," says Sylvia, when Charley remarks that she is very agreeable.

"A little insincerity in a woman does not matter," says that lax young moralist, "if the result is good."

"Indeed!" says Sylvia, in a tone of sarcasm. "How edifying it is to the feeble feminine intellect to hear masculine opinions! If insincerity is not objectionable in a woman, what do you consider it in a man?"

"Almost as contemptible as affectation," Mr. Kenyon replies; "and, unless I am

greatly mistaken, Monsieur Victor Dupont is a very good example of the last."

Sylvia smiles scornfully.

"I have never seen an Anglo-Saxon man," she says, "who did not consider a foreigner, or anybody with foreign manners, affected. Such judgments are—are—"

"Pray don't hesitate to say what they are," remarks Charley, quietly, as she hesitates.

"Are generally the result of prejudice, jealousy, or provincial ignorance," she goes on, impetuously, with the color mounting to her cheeks.

"Prejudice, jealousy, provincial ignorance!" repeats Charley, meditatively. "Under which head does my judgment come, I wonder? Prejudice?—why should I be prejudiced? Jealousy?—of whom should I be jealous? Provincial ignorance?—I am afraid I must plead guilty on that score. I have never been in New Orleans."

"You have been in Paris, however," I observe, "and therefore ought to be familiar with French manners."

"And Miss Dupont's are very good," he says, with the air of one making a deduction.

I give the matter up, and walk on with Eric, leaving Sylvia and Charley to fight their battle alone. We hear them disputing behind us.

"A person may be enthusiastic and effusive without being affected," Sylvia declares.

"With an impressionable temperament, feelings are so easily effaced that persons of that kind are often unjustly accused of insincerity," Charley says.

Eric and I look at each other and smile. We are accustomed to the sparring and wrangling of these two.

We do not go to the French Broad. An avenue which is very creditable to the town has been opened toward it, and along this we walk for some distance, admiring at every step the green landscape around us and the splendid heights far away; but our pedestrian powers are exhausted before we reach the river. Wiser with regard to Asheville distances, and saddened by the necessity of toiling over the cobble-stones which pave the streets, we return to the hotel.

As we approach the door, we are astonished to see a stout lady in the act of being assisted from the small phaeton with which

we have already made acquaintance, by a slender, graceful gentleman.

"There is Mr. Dupont!" says Sylvia, looking at the latter.

"There is Aunt Markham!" I exclaim, looking at the former.

"Aunt Markham!" repeats Charley. "By Jove, so it is! What do you suppose she has been doing?"

"Driving with Mr. Dupont, apparently," says Eric, whom nothing surprises.

We find that this conjecture is correct. When we come up, Aunt Markham receives us benignly.

"Mr. Dupont, whom I believe you have met," she says—we bow, and Mr. Dupont bows—"has been kindly driving me around Asheville a little. It is really a very pretty place—only exceedingly scattered. I should dislike to be obliged to walk very much here. You must all be dreadfully tired."

"I am more vexed than tired," says Sylvia, "for we did not reach the French Broad after all—it is too far away."

"If you would like to see that river, will



Mr. Dupont proposes—a Drive.

you not allow me the pleasure of driving you to it?" says Mr. Dupont, eagerly. "I shall be greatly honored."

Sylvia hesitates.

"But your horse must be tired," she says, "and you—are not you tired, also, of playing cavalier of dames?"

"The horse has done nothing to speak of—nothing to tire him," says the young creole, gallantly; "and, as for me, life offers me no greater happiness than to be a cavalier of dames. If mademoiselle will only be gracious enough to trust herself with me—"

Mademoiselle is gracious. She smiles; nobody knows better than Sylvia herself that she has a very charming smile.

"You are very kind," she says, "and the phaeton looks very inviting. Yes, I will go. The French Broad is only a mile distant, I believe."

As he assists her into the little carriage, Mr. Dupont says something in French—like all creoles, he falls into this language whenever he wants to be very complimentary or impressive—the substance of which is that he should be glad if it were twenty miles distant. Then they drive away, leaving us standing on the sidewalk.

"Mr. Dupont is a most agreeable person," says Aunt Markham, taking Eric's arm as she slowly mounts the steps of the hotel-piazza. "It is a very good test of a young man's breeding and disposition when he is attentive to an elderly woman. He pressed me to drive with him as if I had been seventeen."

Charley puts his hands in the pockets of his coat, and I see that it would relieve his mind to whistle. He refrains, however, and is repaid for this act of self-denial. As we enter the hotel, a light, silvery voice is heard in the parlor, singing a gay French song. "That is Miss Dupont, I suppose," I say to Charley. He nods, and, turning, enters the room. The song breaks off abruptly. There is a trill of laughter; then I hear, "So my brother has carried Sylvia off! Are you inconsolable, Mr. Kenyon?"

"Not if you will let me hear the rest of that song," says Charley the hypocrite.

An hour, two hours pass, without any sign of the return of Sylvia and Mr. Dupont. Aunt Markham grows uneasy, and asks if I do not think that the horse may have run away and killed them, or else that they may have fallen into the river and been drowned. I quiet her fears by assuring her that there is no great probability that either of these

events has occurred. 'I entertain a strong suspicion of what *has* occurred, but I say nothing about it, having long since realized that while men (and women) are what they are, flirtation will be very likely to exist.

The dinner-bell rings presently, and, notwithstanding her uneasiness, Aunt Markham decides not to wait for the absent culprit. "This air gives one a really remarkable appetite," she says. We go down-stairs, therefore, but, as we cross the passage, the tall horse and small phaeton draw up before the door, and Sylvia's pretty, flushed face looks at us.

"Don't scold, auntie!" she cries, as she



The Prize from the Springs.

enters the hall, bearing a large stone jug in both her hands. "I have been on *such* an expedition in your behalf! Can you imagine what I have here? You must taste it at once.—Mr. Dupont, please make somebody bring a glass!"

Mr. Dupont darts away, and in less than a minute returns with a glass. He holds it while Sylvia uncorks the jug.

"Is it mountain-dew?" I ask, skeptically.

She laughs; the liquid flows clear as crystal into the glass; Mr. Dupont presents it, with a bow, to Aunt Markham, who receives and tastes it.

"Sulphur-water!" she says, as one might say "Champagne!"

"Yes, sulphur-water," says Sylvia, exultantly, "quite as good—I mean as bad—as that in Greenbrier, Virginia, of which you are so fond!"

"Not *quite* so good, my dear," says Aunt Markham, tasting again, with the air of a connoisseur. "It is not so strong as the Greenbrier sulphur."

"It is strong enough," says Sylvia. "I tasted it and thought it so abominable that I determined to bring you some at once. So Mr. Dupont went to a house on a hill—"

"All houses are on hills in this country," I say, parenthetically.

"Except those that are in coves," says Sylvia. "He borrowed the jug there, and we are to take it back to-morrow."

"But I thought you made the journey on Aunt Markham's behalf, and from this it appears that you did not think of her until you were at the spring?"

"I will tell you all about it at dinner," says the young lady, flying up-stairs.

At dinner we hear an account of the expedition.

"To begin at the beginning," says Sylvia, "the French Broad is a most beautiful river. We crossed it on a long bridge, and I made Mr. Dupont stop in the middle while I took in the view. On one side the stream—which is so clear that its water is a translucent emerald—winds through a fertile valley, with Smith's Creek—why don't they give things better names?—flowing into it, draped over with lovely trees and vines. On the other side there are bold, green hills, rising abruptly from the water's edge, round the base of which the river makes a sweeping curve as it disappears from sight. It was so charming that I could not bear to come back, and Mr. Dupont, seeing that I was anxious to go farther—"

"H'm!" says Charley.

"Said that he remembered having been here when a child, and staying at a place called Deaver's Springs, a few miles from Asheville. 'It was a very pretty place,' he said, 'if I could remember where it was.' I suggested that we should ask the direction from some inhabitant of the country—which we accordingly did, and heard that we must 'drive straight on.' So we drove straight on, along an excellent ridge road, with mountains

to right of us, mountains to left of us, mountains before us and behind us. I have never conceived any thing so beautiful as the lights and shades on those superb heights, or their exquisite colors. Once we saw rain falling far away among the purple gorges, with the sun shining on it, and the effect was fairly divine!"

"A very common effect among mountains," says Eric.

"I am sorry for people who can only ad-

ignoring this remark, "that we drove on, forgetting all about time and distance, until after a while we reached some bars, where we had been directed to 'turn of'—or, rather, to turn in. Mr. Dupont let them down, and from a house across the road several children came rushing to mind the gap while we went to the spring. The road into which we turned led us past a log-cabin, in front of which two or three stout men were lazily smoking and gossiping. We asked for a tumbler—were



Scene on the Road-side.

mire uncommon things," says Sylvia, "when the things that are best worth admiring in the world are all of them common. Mr. Dupont fully agrees with me that this is the most beautiful country in America."

"I wonder if he has seen them all?" says Charley.

"We were so engrossed," Sylvia proceeds,

given one of thick, green glass, and drove on. Mr. Dupont pointed out a hill on the left as the site of the hotel which was once quite a place of resort."

"I have heard of Deaver's Springs," says Aunt Markham. "The hotel was burned, I believe."

"Yes, burned and never rebuilt; but the

springs are still there, with a pavilion over them. We drove down the hill at the risk of smashing the phaeton or breaking our necks—for, having come so far, of course we felt it incumbent on us to drink some of the water.—As soon as I tasted it, I thought of you, auntie, and I sent Mr. Dupont back to the house to get a vessel in which we could bring some to you. He returned with the jug you have seen, and I filled it *myself*."

"Thank you, my dear," says Aunt Markham.

"The moral of the story," says Eric, "is that this young lady was going to see the French Broad, and the only glimpse of the river to be obtained between Asheville and Deaver's Springs is what you see while crossing it."

"The moral of the story is that the best philosophy in life is to enjoy all that you can, when you can," says Sylvia, gayly.

CHAPTER III.

"And always, be the landscape what it may—
Blue misty hill, or sweep of glimmering plain—
It is the eye's endeavor still to gain
The fine, faint limit of the bounding day.
God haply, in this mystic mode, would fain
Hint of a happier home, far, far away."

"AND this is Beaucatcher in front of us!" says Sylvia. "Such a fine height deserves a better name."

"The name is vulgarly foolish," says Eric, "but, as far as absolute ugliness goes, there are worse within the borders of Buncombe. What do you think of creeks named Hominy, Cane, Turkey, Sandy Mush—?"

"O Eric!"

"Literally true, I assure you. Then there are Beaver Dam, Bull, and Flat—all clear, rushing mountain-streams."

"It is infamous!" says Sylvia, with the most feeling indignation. "Something ought to be done—the Legislature ought to interfere! If the Anglo-Saxon settlers had no sense of poetry in their own rude organizations, they might at least have spared the Indian nomenclature, which is beautiful and appropriate wherever it is found."

"Yes, it is beautiful," says Eric, who has a passion for all Indian names, and repeats them with the lingering intonation which makes them thrice musical. "Compare with

such a nomenclature as I have just mentioned, Swannanoa, Nantahala, Tuckaseegee, Hiawassee, Cheowah, Feloneke, and Tabkeestee—all Cherokee names, and all possessing excellent significations."

"What are the significations?" I ask.

"Swannanoa means 'Beautiful;' Nantahala, 'Woman's Bosom,' from the rise and fall of its breast of waters; Tuckaseegee, 'Ter-rapin Water;' Cheowah, 'River of Otters;' Feloneke, 'Yellow River;' and Tahkeestee—the Cherokee name of the French Broad—is the most expressive of all, for it means 'Racing River.'"

"And no doubt there were any number, just as admirable, which have been lost," says Sylvia. "It is unbearable! We do not find that the French or Spanish settlers left such barbarities behind them."

"No," says Victor Dupont, who is walking by her side, "I have been thinking, while Mr. Markham spoke, of the names in Louisiana and Texas. None of them are ugly unless—forgive me!—they are English. Many melodious Indian names are left, and those which the first settlers gave are full of a religious poetry—such as Laguna del Madre, Isla del Padre, Bay of St. Louis, Bayou St. Denis, Ile au Breton."

"Those are certainly very different from Smithville and Jonesville, and Big Pigeon River," says Sylvia, "but I wish the Indian names could have been preserved everywhere."

This conversation takes place as we walk out of Asheville along the winding road which leads to Beaucatcher. The sun is sinking low toward the western mountains, spreading a mantle of gold over the uplands, and leaving the glades and dells full of softly-toned shadows. Eric and I form the advance-guard of the party. We have been tried friends and comrades for many a day, and, when we were younger, he often paid me the compliment of wishing I were a boy. Sylvia and Victor come next, Charley and Adèle loiter in the rear. Scattered around in every direction are villa-like houses "bosomed high in tufted trees;" before us are the green hills—that in a different country would be esteemed mountains—behind, the marvelous peaks at which we are forbidden to glance.

"Nobody must look round," cries Adèle, playfully, waving a flowering branch. "You shall all be turned to stones, like the princes

in the story of the singing water, if you do!"

"The view is not to be devoured piecemeal," says Charley, "but to be taken whole—like an oyster—from the top of the knob to which we are bound."

So we go on, with our backs to the glory which is behind. The ascent of Beaucatcher is not difficult. A very excellent road leads over it to a highly-cultivated cove in the mountains behind, where day begins an hour or two later, and ends an hour or two earlier, than in Asheville. We leave this road at the gap where it crosses the mountain, and follow a steep path to the top of the knob which rises on the right.

"One could not easily drive up here," says



The Ascent.

Sylvia, as we clamber over the rocks, "but it would be quite possible to ride without difficulty."

"Shall we try it to-morrow, if saddle-horses are to be found in Asheville?" asks her attendant.

"I thought we were to return to the Sulphur Spring to-morrow," she says, laughing.

Eric and I reach the summit first. It is smooth, level, and green. There is a grass-grown fortification where a Confederate battery was once planted, and close beside it a dead tree that from Asheville, and miles be-

yond, presents the perfect appearance of a large cross.

We mount the fortification just as the sun sinks behind the distant mountains. At our feet Asheville is spread, but we scarcely glance at the picture which the town presents, crowning the verdant beauty of its summer hills, with the fertile valleys of the French Broad and Swannanoa on each side. Our gaze turns beyond—to the azure world that stretches, far as the eye can reach, to the golden gate-way of the sun—an infinity of loveliness, with the sunset radiance trembling on the crests of more than a hundred peaks. The atmosphere is so transparent that it is impossible to say how far the range of one's vision extends. Mountains rise behind mountains, until they recede away into dimmest distance, their trending lines lying faint and far against the horizon. Blue as heaven, and soft as clouds, the nearer ranges stand—serried rank behind rank, and peak upon peak.

The view is so boundless and so beautiful, that the imagination is for a time overwhelmed. Are those sapphire heights the Delectable Mountains?—and do those dazzling clouds veil the jasper walls of the city of God? It almost seems so. The sunset sky is a miracle of loveliness—of tints which it would be presumption to attempt to describe—and the majestic sides of Pisgah grow softly purple as the incarnadine glow falls over its towering pinnacle.

"Oh, what a scene!" says Sylvia, with a long sigh. She stands like one entranced, gazing at the farthest peaks where their blue outlines melt into the sunset gold.

"I scarcely thought there were so many mountains in the world," says Adèle Dupont.

"It is one great charm of the Asheville views," says Eric, without looking round—he is standing in front, with his arms folded—"that they possess such magnificent expanse, and all the effect of farthest distance. It is difficult to exaggerate the advantages of the incomparable situation of the town—especially in the fact that, although surrounded by mountains, it is not overshadowed, but regards them from a sufficient distance, and a sufficient elevation, to behold them like this."

"I see several depressions, like gaps, in the chain," I observe. "What are they?"

"They are gaps," Eric answers. "That

farthest west is the gorge of the French Broad. Yonder is the Homminy Gap—there the Hickory-Nut. Swannanoa is in the east.”

“Don’t let us go home,” says Sylvia. “Let us live in this land of the sky forever. It is enchanted.”

“I think it is,” says Victor Dupont.

“As a Frenchman remarked of Niagara, it is ‘grande—magnifique—very good!’” says Charley. “Do you mean to live just here? Shall we build you a cottage, and call the hill—to the absurd name of which you very justly object—Mount Sylvia?”

“The name would suit it very well,” I say. “It is sylvan enough.”

“No,” says Eric, “don’t build a cottage here. “Wait until I show you the view from McDowell’s Hill. It is finer than this.”

Chorus: “Finer than this! Impossible!”

“Wait and see,” says our leader.

But we refuse to entertain such an idea. With the enthusiasm of ignorance, we cannot believe that any thing—not even the view from the Black Mountain itself—can surpass the scene spread before us in softest beauty, to the farthest verge of the dying day. We sit on the fortification and watch the fires of sunset slowly fade, and the lovely dusk of summer steal over the land. Winds laden with the freshness of the great hills come to us from remote distances. Venus gleams into sight like a tremulous diamond in the delicate sky. The immense expanse, the great elevation, seem to embody at once infinity and repose.

“This is delightful!” says Charley. “We may fancy ourselves lotus-eaters, ‘propped on beds of amaranth’ far above the world.”

Sylvia smiles; and, without turning her eyes from the distant scene, she repeats in the sweetest tone of her sweet voice:

“Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind.
For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts
are hurled
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds
are lightly curled
Round their golden houses, girdled with the
gleaming world.”

“That was all very well for the gods,” says Eric, “but we have no nectar, and *your* golden house is not yet built, Sylvia; therefore we must go down to supper.”

Chorus: “Not yet. Let us stay a little longer.”

“The enchanted hours of life are short,” says Victor Dupont. “Let us enjoy them to the last minute.”

“Let me know when the last minute comes,” says Eric, walking away.

It does not come for some time. We cannot resolve to break the spell which rests over us. We talk very little, and that little in low tones. It is enough to see the splendor of the west grow faint and more faint, while the far, heavenly mountains change from blue to tender gray. Suddenly Charley lifts himself on his elbow and points toward the east. We turn and see the silver face of the full moon rising slowly over the tree-tops into the hyacinth sky.

The appearance of her pale, pure majesty above the chain of hills that stretch eastward to the Black, fills our cup of pleasure to the brim. It is a scene to hold in remembrance while life shall last. We linger until we see lights like stars, gleaming here and there in Asheville. Then we know that our enchanted hour has ended.

“At least *one* enchanted hour,” says Sylvia, as Mr. Dupont folds her shawl around her, “but I hope that there are many more in reserve for us. Like Moses, I have had a glimpse of the Promised Land, and now I shall not be content till I have seen every thing that is to be seen.”

Silver lights and dark shadows are lying on the streets of Asheville when, foot-sore and weary, we cross the large open square in the business part of the town, and turn into the street which leads to our hotel. To tired and hungry humanity, the lights blazing out from the last are more cheerful than the beauty of the great constellations shining overhead; and, although Eric has made one or two astronomical remarks, we have not paid them the attention which no doubt they deserve.

“To-morrow night we will go to Battery Porter and study astronomy at our leisure,” says Sylvia. “To-night I shall first do full justice to the *cuisine* of the ‘Eagle,’ then I shall beg Mr. Dupont to play for me the ‘Cradle Song,’ and perhaps a strain or two of Mendelssohn. After that I shall say good-night to everybody, I shall go to bed, and I shall sleep—like a top!”

“I thought you would have said like an angel,” says Victor.

"But angels never sleep," says Charley.

This programme is carried out. After supper the young creole goes to the piano, shrugs his shoulders in expressive disgust over its untuned condition, and makes Sylvia



At the Piano.

understand that it is only because *she* desires it that he condescends to touch so poor an instrument. But when he begins to play, he draws forth, even from it, such melody that the chattering groups which fill the room are hushed into silence. His sister is right—he is an admirable musician, an amateur evidently, but cultivated in taste and *technique* as few amateurs are. His music is in the lullaby key which Sylvia suggested—the "Cradle Song" for which she asked, and those exquisite, dreamy nocturnes in which German composers excel—until at last he turns and asks with a smile if she is asleep.

"Not yet," she answers, "but, if this goes on, I soon shall be. It is like mesmerism."

"Before you go," he says, "listen to what I thought of when we came down that hillside this evening with the moonlight and delicate shadows all about us."

His lissome fingers sweep the keys, and the next instant we hear the fairies lightly tripping over the greensward in the wonderful *scherzo* of Berlioz's "Queen Mab." The fairy-like measure seems to us—who have so lately looked on the scene which suggested it to the musician's recollection—filled with a double grace and sentiment. Queen Mab's court, if we had surprised them at their revels, could scarcely have charmed us more.

When the strain ceases, Sylvia looks at the musician with her eyes shining.

"Whenever I think of this evening," she says, "I shall always think of that."

"And whenever I hear or play it, I shall think of *you*," says the young man.

"I am afraid this is going to be a very serious flirtation," I say to myself, as I walk across the room to where Aunt Markham is sitting, trying to look interested in a conversation on mineralogy, which Eric is holding with a gentleman well known for his devotion to that science. I am rather inclined to like mineralogy—at least to the extent of taking an interest in probable diamonds and emeralds—so, I join the group, and receive a great deal of information on the mineral wealth of Western North Carolina, which unhappily I forget as soon as it is acquired.

Adèle Dupont is, meanwhile, the centre of a group at the other end of the apartment. She is charmingly dressed, and her gay, vivacious manners have a fascination which the men surrounding her plainly feel. Charley is not among them. Music may have charms to soothe the savage, but not the jealous, breast. Some time since he muttered something about smoking, and took his departure. In a lull of the conversation around me, I hear Adèle's light tones addressing her court.

"What birds of passage you all seem to be! No two of you come from the same point, no two of you are going to the same point. It reminds me of the old nursery game—'One flew east, and one flew west, and one flew over the eagle's nest.'"

"I wish you would fly with us to-morrow," says one of the gentlemen, gallantly.

"But with the best disposition in the world to be obliging, I could not fly with *all* of you," she answers, laughing.

When I retire presently and fall asleep, my dreams are a strange *mélange* of blue mountains and tripping fairies, of Aladdin's garden—the mineralogy is accountable for this—and men in strange guise flying east and west and north and south over endless peaks. Notwithstanding these freaks of fancy, my slumbers are sound and sweet, for Buncombe nights are delicious in their coolness—nights of which to dream in the heat-parched, mosquito-haunted low country.

I sleep late the next morning, and, when I wake, Sylvia is gone. I rub my eyes and

look again. There is no doubt of the fact—her bed is empty, her boots have vanished. She is certainly gone. I gaze around in mute amazement. In all the twenty years that I have had the pleasure of her acquaintance, such a thing has never happened before as that, of her own accord—without the most stringent outside pressure—*Sylvia* should rise with the lark.

While I make my toilet I wonder what this strange caprice can possibly mean, and it is not until I am nearly dressed that the mystery is solved. Then the door opens, and the pleasant, dusky face of our chambermaid appears. She has come to tell me that "the gentleman" wants to know if I am ready for breakfast.

The gentleman in question is *Eric*, so I reply that I shall be ready presently. "You can hand me a necktie," I add; "and pray, *Malvina*, do you know what has become of my sister?"

Malvina is evidently surprised. She pauses on her way to the trunk, and stares at me.

"I thought you would have heard the young lady, ma'am," she replies, "though it's true she was very keener not to make a noise to disturb you. I waked her at five o'clock, and she went to ride."

"To ride!" I ejaculate. "With whom?"

"I think she called the gentleman Mr.—Mr. *Dewpan*," answers *Malvina*.

Then I remember that there were signs of a secret understanding between *Sylvia* and *Victor Dupont* the night before, and, when they parted, I caught the words "sunrise" and "Beaucatcher"—but I was too sleepy to give them due weight, or to be equal to that mathematical calculation known as putting two and two together. Now, every thing is plain. "Sunrise—ah!" I say to myself. "Not difficult to understand what *that* means!"

Leaving my room, I meet Aunt *Markham* issuing from hers, and as we go down-stairs together I tell her of *Sylvia's* escapade. She is surprised and concerned.

"To mount a strange horse—how rash! She may be thrown—there may be a terrible accident—who knows whether Mr. *Dupont* understands horses?"

"He is old enough to understand them," I say—and just then a cheery voice speaks above us:

"Good-morning, madame!—good-morn-

ing, mademoiselle. Ah, what a charming day!—is it not?—how cool, how fresh, how delicious!"

We glance up. Descending the stairs is *Madame Latour*—*Adèle Dupont's* aunt—a vivacious lady, with dark eyes, a sallow complexion, and a foot like a fairy.

"It is pleasant to think that, while we have been sleeping, those dear young people have been enjoying the first freshness of this delightful morning!" she goes on, after we have returned her greeting. "*Chère petite Adèle* was so eager about her ride that she must have waked at five o'clock. I saw them off from my window. Ah, it was heavenly, the air sweet, the birds singing!—and then I returned to bed like a sluggard."

"So Miss *Dupont* went to ride, also," says Aunt *Markham*. "I wonder if there is no danger about the horses? Do you think Mr. *Dupont* was quite sure that they were safe? When one gentleman has charge of two ladies—"

"Pardon!" says *Madame Latour*, looking a little surprised, "but Mr. *Kenyon* went also. He accompanied *Adèle*. *Victor* escorted your charming niece. Be sure she is quite safe under his protection. He is a dauntless rider," etc., etc.

I do not hear the end of the panegyric on Mr. *Dupont*, because I am so much surprised by this news of *Charley*. If it is strange that *Sylvia* should have been smitten with a mania for the beauties of Nature, sufficient to rouse her from her slumbers at daylight, what can be thought of an indolent gentleman, who has consistently and persistently declined to appreciate those beauties, when he also leaves his pillow for the saddle at five o'clock in the morning?

We go to breakfast, and are devoting ourselves to beefsteak, hot cakes, and coffee, when the matutinal equestrians make their appearance. They come in directly from horseback—the girls still in their habits, loose locks of hair floating, fresh color mantling, youth and good spirits in looks, manner, and bearing. They cause quite a sensation in the large dining-room as they make their way to our table. *Sylvia* sits down and heaves a deep sigh—a common mode with her of expressing inexpressible feelings.

"Oh, it was heavenly!" she says.

"I am hungry as a wolf," remarks *Charley*. "What will I have?" (to the waiter:)

"Any thing and every thing! When a man has been riding on an empty stomach for three hours, he is ready to exhaust your bill-of-fare."

"Mrs. Markham," cries Adèle, eagerly, "it was lovely beyond every thing you can imagine!—Victor, tell them all about it! I am famished."

"I wonder if she thinks Victor is not famished, too?" says Eric, under his mustache.

However that may be, Victor obeys. Like most Frenchmen and people of French blood, he describes dramatically—his dark eyes quicken, he uses many gestures.

"When we rode out of Asheville," he says, "it was very early—some time before sunrise—and the mist, like a white curtain, wrapped every thing. We knew that this would add greatly to the effect if we could reach the top of the hill on which we were yesterday evening, in time to see the sunrise, so we rode at a brisk pace and soon



The Morning Ride.

found ourselves there—mademoiselle and myself in advance of Adèle and Mr. Kenyon."

"My horse was slow," says Adèle, "and I grew tired of urging him on—I knew we should reach there soon enough."

"We rode up to the fortification," continues Mr. Dupont. "The east was all aglow with radiance—the most beautiful colors momentarily changing on the sky—and the re-

flection fell over and gilded the great sea of vapor at our feet, which the wind was gently agitating into billows."

"The resemblance to the sea was perfect," says Sylvia, eagerly. "You cannot imagine any thing more delusive! The waves caught the light on their crests, just as ocean-waves do. All below us—all over Asheville and the distant mountains—there was nothing to be seen but this boundless, rippling expanse, aglow with tints so roseate and so radiant that we could only stand and gaze in breathless wonder. The effect lasted I cannot tell how long, but for some time."

"At least half an hour," says Mr. Dupont. "Then the sun rose over the hills behind us, and his rays fell horizontally over the shifting sea of vapor. For a minute it was like a vast deep of molten gold heaving and tossing at our feet. Then it began to dissolve, and peaks tinged with the same beautiful tints appeared here and there like islands."

"Pisgah first!" says Sylvia. "You should have seen how superbly the great crest came up out of the mist which still clung around the lower heights. Then gradually the other mountain-tops appeared, and we saw islands and continents, diversified by seas and lakes—all bathed in the most delicious colors!"

"I'll tell you what it was like," says Charley, speaking for the first time. "It was as if the world was being newly created, and we saw the water divided from the land."

"And every thing was so fresh!" cries Sylvia. "The earth seemed, as Charley says, new made. I don't think I have ever known an hour of purer delight than that which we spent on Beaucatcher—odious name!"

"Mount Sylvia," says Victor Dupont, with a smile.

"Well, Mount Sylvia, then. Even after our sea was dried up, the mist of early morning still wrapped in soft haze the far heavenly heights of the glorious prospect. Asheville remained submerged to the last, but, when finally we saw its green hills and scattered houses emerge, we turned our horses' heads, and, piloted by Charley, descended Beau—Mount Sylvia at the back. The road led us down, through a shaded gorge of the hills, to the valley of the Swannanoa. Oh, if I could—if I only *could* tell you of all the beautiful things we saw! We raved over evening scenes—over the long shadows and west-

ering light—yet how pathetic it is compared with the joyousness of early morning! The effects of light and shade are somewhat similar, but the spirit is so different. If you could have seen the rocks this morning blushing in the sun, the mosses and lichens, gemmed with dew and hung with fairy-like cobwebs, the ineffable freshness of the whole landscape—as if Nature had washed her face—and then the river, when we reached it—ah!”

“Total bankruptcy in the matter of adjectives!” says Eric, aside. “I have been anticipating it for some time. What a fortunate thing that Miss Dupont’s appetite is so excellent, else she would probably take up the strain and chant for us the beauties of the *Swaannanoa*!”

After breakfast I chance to be coming down-stairs just as Charley is standing alone in the hall, lighting a cigar. I take advantage of the opportunity to walk up to him, to button-hole him, and conduct him into a private corner. Here I look straight into his eyes.

“Charley,” I say, “what is the meaning of your conduct this morning? What unhal-lowed influence is at work with you? Such a thing has never been known before that you—you should rise at daylight for the pleasure of riding several miles with a young lady! Tell me, honestly and seriously, are you flirting, or are you falling in love, with this girl?”

“Women’s heads always run on flirting and falling in love,” replies Charley, with an air of carelessness. “Suppose I return your question and ask you whether Sylvia is flirting or falling in love with *Monsieur le Musicien*?”

“What insufferable nonsense! How dare you imagine that she is doing either? Can she not be civil and agreeable to the young man without incurring such suspicions?”

“And can I not be civil and agreeable to Miss Dupont without incurring ditto?”

“Of course, if you choose to take that tone about it, there is nothing to be said,” I remark, with dignity, “but, if you think I do not understand the matter, you are vastly mistaken!”

“I don’t know that there is any thing to understand,” says Charley, coolly, “except that Sylvia is amusing herself with Mr. Dupont, and I am allowing Miss Dupont to amuse herself with me. *Voilà tout!*”

“I hope you are not both playing with fire,” I say, vexedly.

“If we are, we shall probably be scorched,” returns Monsieur Imperturbable, walking away.

CHAPTER IV.

“A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumb’rous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land. Far off three mountain-tops
Stood sunset-flushed.”

“ALICE,” says Sylvia, as she stands before the mirror arranging her hat, “I shall ride with Mr. Dupont this afternoon.”



Preparing for the Ride.

“Very well,” I answer, indifferently, being engaged just then in fitting on my gloves and gazing out of the window. “There seem to be a great many people here,” I remark, “and such a number of ox-carts!”

“And I want *you* to go with Charley,” she proceeds.

“Indeed!” I say, roused to interest by

this. "How kind of you to think of me! But there is one slight objection to my going with Charley—he has not asked me to do so."

"But you can ask him to go with you," she says, persuasively. "You can take him in the phaeton, and make Eric go on horse-back with Adèle."

"If he and Eric were puppets, and if I had any desire for Charley's society, I might—perhaps. As it is, such a thing is impossible. Why do you suggest it?"

"Because I don't want Adèle to have the pleasure of flirting with him," is the candid reply. "She is a dreadful flirt, and has a particular knack of making fools of men. Of course, I am not afraid of her making a fool of Charley in any *serious* manner, but still I should like her to be disappointed—and you know she could do nothing with Eric."

"I know that I have occasionally heard of such a thing as Satan reproving sin. If you want Charley looked after, why don't you do it yourself?"

"How can I, with Mr. Dupont on my hands?"

"Turn Mr. Dupont over to me. I will take charge of *him*."

I make this suggestion in a spirit of malice which Sylvia understands. She takes up her gloves as she quietly replies:

"Mr. Dupont asked me if I would not ride with him. It is impossible, therefore, for me to turn him over to any one else."

"I am afraid Charley will become a hopeless victim to Miss Dupont's fascinations, then," Isay, coolly.

Events verify this prediction. When we go down-stairs, we find the horses standing before the door, and Charley in the act of assisting Miss Dupont to her saddle. This feat is accomplished very well on both sides.

The lady puts one dainty foot—all creole women have pretty feet—into the gentleman's hand, he lifts her, she springs, and presto! the thing is done. Mr. Kenyon swings himself into his own saddle as quickly, then turns and waves his hand to us—

"She is won! we are off, over bush, bank, and scur—

They'll have fleet steeds that follow,"

he says, as they ride away.

"Their steeds were not particularly fleet the last time they rode, were they, Mr. Dupont?" says Sylvia, looking after them. "Adèle, you know, said her horse wouldn't go; but he seems to go now very well. I hope they will miss the road for their hypocrisy!"

"Charley has probably taken care to make inquiries," says Eric, handing me into the small phaeton.

Few rivers have been more praised and rhymed than the Swannanoa, toward which



The Swannanoa.

we take our way. To those who have not penetrated far into the mountains, and seen wilder and lovelier streams, it is certainly a thing of beauty. The stream itself is clear as crystal, and flows with glancing swiftness between its vine-draped banks, while it is scarcely possible to imagine a more charming picture of fertility than the valley presents. We follow the river for several miles—every turn opening fresh scenes of loveliness—and finally pause at a ford where Sylvia and Mr. Dupont ride into the stream. Lances of sunlight dart through the lace-work of shade, touch the sparkling current, and dapple the glossy coats of the horses. The rippling river makes a background in long perspective for the two riders, and on the opposite side the road leads up between high, picturesque banks.

"Is not this delightful?" cries Sylvia. "One might expect to see Diana and all her nymphs. Instead, I see an ox-cart coming in one direction, and two horsemen in another."

The ox-cart is lumbering directly down



Ox-Cart.

upon the phaeton in which I am seated, so I cry out to Eric for rescue. He comes and drives into the river just as the two horse-

men ride down between the sloping, shade-arched banks.

At this double invasion of the ford, Sylvia and her escort turn their horses to ride out, and in doing so face the last-comers. One of them stops and lifts his hat.

"Miss Norwood!" he cries. "What an unexpected pleasure!"

Sylvia checks her horse, and holds out her hand with a laugh.

"Is it possible this is you, Mr. Lanier?" she says.

Eric and I glance at each other. We both think of Charley. Of all Sylvia's suitors—and she has not a few—Ralph Lanier is the most devoted, the most persevering, and the most wealthy. Consequently, he is the one whom all her friends and acquaintances have long since decided to be destined by Providence for her.

Mr. Lanier is plainly delighted at the encounter. "To think that I should meet you here!" he says, rapturously. "My uncle has a country-seat near Flat Rock, and I have been spending a week or two with him. We only came to Asheville this morning, and I was thinking of leaving the mountains to-morrow."

"Leaving!—so early in the season?" says Sylvia. "What a strange idea!"

"I find this country very dull," says Mr. Lanier, shrugging his shoulders. "I am no great admirer of Nature. I prefer civilization and society. I was thinking of going to the White Sulphur and Saratoga, and hoped very much to meet you."

"You would have been disappointed," she says, coolly. "I have become an Arcadian, and abjured all resorts of that kind. We are just beginning an extensive tour through this country which bores you so much.—By-the-by, here are Alice and Eric—and let me present Mr. Dupont."

Hands are shaken and proper speeches made—the Swannanoa, the while, rippling gently round us, the sunbeams slanting, the vines drooping, the setting of the whole scene idyllic enough for a pastoral poem. We learn that Mr. Lanier is accompanying his uncle to pay a visit to a friend who lives near by.

"Nonsense!" says Eric. "A man does not come to Arcadia to pay or receive visits. We are going to McDowell's Hill for the sunset. You had better come with us."

"Probably Mr. Lanier is no admirer of sunsets," says Sylvia, with a slight touch of scorn in her tone.

Mr. Lanier is quick enough to hear this. "On the contrary, I admire them exceedingly," he says. "If my uncle will excuse me, I will accompany you with pleasure."

The uncle readily excuses him, so he turns his horse and rides by Sylvia's side up the road down which he came. As Eric and I follow, we exchange a few remarks about the pleasure in store for Charley.

"Poor fellow!" I say. "An evil fate seems to war against him. I could not help hoping that on this expedition he might have a fair field for once; yet see!—first Mr. Dupont appeared, and now Ralph Lanier, his most formidable rival."

"Charley is his own worst rival," says Eric, touching the horse sharply. "If Sylvia ends by marrying somebody else, it will be his fault, and I shall not pity him. A man should be ready to fight for every thing—fortune, fame, and the woman he loves."

When we reach McDowell's Hill we find all the equestrians assembled, Sylvia attended by her two cavaliers, Charley standing with an air of great nonchalance by Adèle's horse. Only the very best actors do not overact a part, however, and there is a trifle too much nonchalance in this young gentleman's bearing for perfect unconcern. The manner in which his hat is pushed back as he looks up into Adèle's eyes is significant of irritated defiance. As soon as we draw up, he turns abruptly and comes to the side of the phaeton.

"Where did you pick up that fellow?" he asks.

"He is a fish caught in the Swannanoa," says Eric. "I think you may find him a kindred spirit: he is nearly as fond of Nature, and of the exertion which a liking of that kind entails, as you are."

"I should not judge so from his appearance," says Charley, with a sneer.

Now, it must be stated that there is nothing in Mr. Lanier's appearance to draw forth a sneer. He is dressed as men in cities dress, but that is, to say the least, not a heinous crime, and he would be called by most people a very handsome man. Charley is not handsome, though his frank, pleasant

face is infinitely more agreeable than Ralph Lanier's well-cut features. His blue eyes look into mine with an odd kind of appeal, and I say hurriedly, "Don't be disconsolate, Charley—he talks of going to-morrow!" Then Eric claims my attention for the view.

It is certainly fine, though not so extensive as that from Beaucatcher. At our feet the hill shelves down abruptly, and two hundred feet below lies a green expanse—the valleys of the French Broad and Swannanoa at their junction. Here the Swannanoa, making a graceful curve on the verdant plain, empties its waters into the channel of the beautiful stream which has come from the far heights of the Balsam to seek it. It is only possible to mark the winding course of its current by the trees that fringe its banks, but the French Broad spreads out in full view—its splendid "breast of waters" shining in the glow of sunset. Bounding the cultivated valley, green hills roll softly up, while beyond stretches the blue-waving mountain-line, with the majestic outlines of Pisgah and the Cold Mountain overtopping their lower brethren. Far and faint in the west the trending heights that overlook Tennessee stand, their violet crests outlined against a bed of glory into which the sun is sinking with great pomp.

This portion of the view is like that which Beaucatcher commands, but turning northward we have a prospect which no other point near Asheville possesses. There, dark and massive, rise the great peaks of Craggy, and the stately pinnacle of the Black. As usual, these mountains are cloud-topped, and even at this distance—eighteen or twenty miles—wear the deep shade of color which has given a name to the range. Spurs running down from them form a chain of hills around the entire northeastern horizon, and at their base lies Asheville, scattered over its picturesque slopes.

"I am converted," says Mr. Lanier, breaking the silence. "The country which contains such views as this is worth seeing.—Miss Norwood, will you accept a recruit for your party?"

"I must refer you to Eric," says Sylvia. "I am not the leader of the party, nor qualified to judge of your fitness for the service. I am afraid, however, that, if you like society and civilization, you will be disgusted with the wilds to which we are going."

"But we shall take the best of society and civilization with us," he remarks, gallantly.

"We'll show you at least what a mountain-view is before we get back," says Charley. "Only hopeless ignorance could excuse anybody for thinking this worth any special admiration."

There is a chorus of indignant dissent, in which only Sylvia fails to join. She says, quietly: "We are both hopelessly ignorant then, Mr. Lanier, for I think this the most beautiful view I have seen in the mountains."

"You have not yet seen anything at all," says Charley. "Beaucatcher in itself is very little, but it is finer than this, which proves that your taste needs cultivation. Mr. Lanier, no doubt, will be able to assist you in cultivating it."

What reply the young lady makes is not audible to the rest of the party, but there is a flash in her eye and a flush on her cheek that do not bode well for Master Charley.

After this hostilities are suspended while we watch the sun go down behind the last chain of western heights. For several minutes after his disk has disappeared, the mountains behind which he sank are transformed into dazzling, translucent gold. The effect is indescribable.

"They cannot be mountains; they *must* be clouds," some one says; but they are mountains, though they lie like clouds on the distant horizon.

Meanwhile a haze of luminous color spreads over the blue chain encircling the southern sky, and the wide breast of the French Broad is painted by the magical splendor.

It is so beautiful that we linger until the fires of sunset have nearly burned out, and Venus is shining in serene state. Then we return to Asheville by a road which leads through woods full of dusk shadows and sweet odors. Arching shade droops over us; the air is inexpressibly fresh and pure; we cross a bridge with the ripple of flowing water underneath; every sound seems "but an echo of tranquillity" in the soft hush of the summer twilight.

When we reach the hotel we find Aunt Markham on the piazza. The carriages and horses have arrived, she tells us, and have made the trip very well.

"John" (the coachman) "assures me that the road over Hickory-Nut Gap is excellent," she says. "We will certainly return that way."

Rupert makes the same report.

"I saw no bad road at all," he says. "We crossed the Gap and came on to Asheville to-day easily."

Eric and Charley go to look after John and the horses, while Mr. Lanier expresses again an intention of joining our party.

"The only way to travel through such a country as this is in the manner you propose," he says. "I can easily obtain a horse from my uncle if I may be allowed to join you."

"We shall be happy to have you do so," says Aunt Markham, graciously.

She glances at Sylvia, and I know as well what she is thinking as if her thoughts were expressed in words. As I turn and go upstairs, I think again, "Poor Charley!"

Two hours later the moon is rising, when we leave the hotel and take our way to an elevated point in the western part of the town known as "Battery Porter." We are advised against visiting this at night, and warned of fences to be climbed and terrible dogs to be braved, but such trifles do not weigh with tourists in search of a view.

Aunt Markham declines to accompany us, but Rupert volunteers to do so. To raise our spirits he draws from his pocket, and opens, an enormous knife.

"I could cut a dog's throat with that," he says.

I am amused at the order into which the procession falls. Miss Dupont slips her hand with an air of proprietorship into Charley's arm.

"You'll take care of me, I'm sure," she says, in a tone of confident trust.

"I'll defy all the dogs in Asheville, if need be," he answers—but I see him glance at Sylvia.

This young lady has in some intangible manner made it understood that she prefers Mr. Lanier's attendance, therefore I find Mr. Dupont at my side. He is courteous and attentive, but a little melancholy. No doubt it is trying to be coolly laid on the shelf when a new admirer appears on the scene. An Anglo-Saxon man under such circumstances sulks, or else (like Charley) diverts his mind by flirting with some one else. This young

creole is merely pensive, and we stroll along, talking of music—of Schumann, and Wagner, and Thomas's orchestra—while Sylvia's gay laugh floats back to us, and Eric and Rupert discuss the horses and the roads behind.

Before attempting the dangers of the narrow road which leads to Battery Porter we decide to wait until the moon rises sufficiently to show us the enemy's movements. We pause, therefore, in a street bounded on one side by a low stone-wall, beyond which is a sloping field, and on the other by a row of houses set on the side of a hill, which rises in the rear to the elevation we desire to ascend. Here, on the stone-wall, we sit down in a row and watch the moon rise.

It is very beautiful. There is an alabaster glow all over the eastern sky, against which the trees on the distant hill-tops stand distinctly defined, and the great cross on Beaucatcher is thrown into relief by the broad, yellow shield of the moon herself. The circle of mountains all around the horizon are bathed in radiance, while Asheville—which we partly overlook—still lies in shadow. Lights gleam here and there from the houses, foliage is darkly massed in every direction, overhead the stars shine in the dark-blue sky with a brilliance which almost seems to equal the advancing moonlight. From the field below us rises a dewy odor of sweet, fresh grass.

"Come out and hear the waters shoot, the owl hoot, the owl hoot;

Yon crescent moon—a golden boat—hangs dim behind the tree, O!

The dropping thorn makes white the grass, O sweetest lass and sweetest lass,

Come out and smell the ricks of hay adown the croft with me, O!"

It is Ralph Lanier who repeats this as he stands by Sylvia, and we think the application, despite a few trifling inaccuracies, very good. The "sweetest lass" looks up with her brightest smile. "How charming!" she says. "What a picture those four lines paint!"

"Not any prettier picture than this," says Rupert. He is standing erect on the wall, despite a suggestion from Charley that people may fancy the Cardiff giant has arrived in their midst.

"Or perhaps they will think that some imprudent person has found and opened one of King Solomon's bottles," says Sylvia. "Rupert always reminds me of those remarkable geni in the 'Arabian Nights.' He is so

very long in proportion to his width—just as if he had shot up out of a bottle suddenly—and he can double himself into such a small compass, that I think he could go back again, if necessary."

"I'm slim—that's the reason I look so tall," says Rupert. "But I shouldn't think any thing in the way of height could astonish people here, after some of the men I've seen. There! now she's over the trees!" (This remark applies to the moon.) "Let us go on to Battery Porter.—Brother Eric, hadn't we better open our knives?"

These weapons prove unnecessary. The dogs rush out and bark at us, making night hideous with their uproar, but, deterred probably by the imposing appearance of our phalanx, they make no attack. We pass the point of danger, and reach the open summit of the hill in safety.

Then what a picture is spread around us! North, south, east, and west, the eye sweeps over an apparently limitless prospect, bounded only by far, faint mountain-lines, and bathed in a flood of enchantment. It is not night, but sublimated day—white, lustrous, magical, and so still that we hear the refrain which the French Broad is chanting as it takes its way between the hills that overshadow it.

"How distinctly one hears that river!" says Lanier. "It can't be far away."

"Not more than half a mile, I suppose," answers Victor Dupont.

"How beautiful it must be in this light!" cries Sylvia, addressing the company. "Let us go down there. It will be better than staying here."

"And returning to the hotel better than either," says Charley.

"Then do *you* return," she says. "But I don't think one can possibly have too much of this divine beauty. All who are in favor of adjourning to the French Broad please hold up their hands."

Three pairs of hands are immediately lifted—to wit, Mr. Dupont's, Mr. Lanier's, and Rupert's. "I shall be well protected, at any rate," says Sylvia, coolly. "Will nobody else come?"

"I've no doubt everybody else will come," says Mr. Lanier. "How can they resist such an invitation?—Miss Dupont, you don't really mean to stay behind?"

No, Adèle does not mean to stay behind. The French Broad by moonlight is too tempt-

ing for her powers of resistance, even though the reluctance of her attendant is patent to the dullest observation.

Carried away by the contagion of example, and feeling, in a measure, bound to look after the others, Eric and I bring up the rear, and so we stroll, in straggling procession, down the winding, moonlit road, toward the French Broad.

The least romantic of us feel repaid for our walk when we stand, at length, on the bridge, and see the river flowing underneath, all silver light and dark shadows. This bridge seems to mark the boundary of the change which awaits the stream. Up to this point it is swift but placid, impetuous yet not tumultuous, and flows through the loveliest of fertile valleys—first in Transylvania, then in Buncombe. Looking up the stream we see, lying white in the moonlight, the broad fields of the last; but, turning our gaze down the current, a very different picture greets us. Sheer and bold rise the hills among which the river enters here, and which it will not leave again until it has cut its stormy way through to Tennessee.

"It seems to invite us to follow it," says Sylvia, watching the sweeping current. "Listen! does it not say 'Come and follow me?' Why should we not do so?"

"Why not?" says Charley. "Yonder is a canoe. Let us embark and attempt the through navigation of the French Broad."

"We can at least get into the canoe and take a row," says Adèle. "What is the good of water if one cannot go on it?"

"A row!—a pole, you mean," says Charley. "That is a mere dug-out, with half a foot of water in the bottom."

"I know all about poling," says Rupert, cheerfully. "I'll take you, Miss Dupont."

But Miss Dupont thinks of her pretty boots, her dainty skirts, and declines. "Dug-outs are muddy things," she says. "Now, at the Warm Springs there are excellent boats."

"The Warm Springs!" says Sylvia. "That is what I mean—that is where the river is inviting us. Why should we not go there at once?"

"There is no reason why we should not—if you like," says Eric.

"O mademoiselle," says Victor, reproachfully, "how can you be so cruel? You prom-

ised that you would join our party. And now to talk of turning in the opposite direction!"

"I don't think I promised, Mr. Dupont," says the young lady, calmly. "I had no right to promise for the rest, you know. Of course, we can't decide anything without Aunt Markham's consent; but I am inclined to think that this might be the best time to go down to the Warm Springs. A little gayety, now and then, is relished by the wisest men—and women. Asheville is not very gay."

"But Nature!" says the young man, rather aghast. "I thought you were so enthusiastic. I thought gayety would only annoy you!"

"Not at all," says Sylvia. "On the contrary, I like it—taken with Nature. And then this magnificent river! I *must* see it before I go anywhere else. I shall propose the Warm Springs to Aunt Markham, to-morrow. Meanwhile, I am going to get into the canoe, despite the half a foot of water, and whoever likes may come and pole me."

CHAPTER V.

"Cliffs that rear their haughty head
Hard o'er the river's darksome bed,
Where now all naked, wild, and gray,
Now waving all with greenwood spray;
The trees to every crevice clung
And o'er the dell their branches hung,
And there, all splintered and unween,
The shivered rocks ascend to heaven."

SYLVIA carries her point without much difficulty. None of us are averse to turning our faces down the French Broad, and Aunt Markham is specially pleased by the idea.

"It is a good plan," she says, "because we shall escape joining the Dupont party. That Madame—what is her name?—fatigues me to death with her raptures and compliments."

"I think the Dupont party is, in a certain sense, at the bottom of the suggestion," says Eric. "It changes our plan of travel altogether, but I am not inconsolable. I can endure any thing better than traveling in a gang, like convicts."

"You are very felicitous in your comparisons," says Charley. "I doubt whether we shall get rid of Dupont, however. He is

so desperate that I think he will leave his own party to join ours."

"Perhaps you will exchange with him," says Sylvia. "I can't imagine how you will support life without Adèle."

"It will be difficult, no doubt," says Charley, serenely, "but in traveling, as in politics, it is best to stand by one's party. If Dupont joins us, I shall not greatly object. He is a degree or two better than that fellow Lanier."

The gentleman designated in this complimentary manner, meanwhile makes his arrangements to join us. But, when we are in readiness to start, one of those unavoidable misfortunes that sometimes befall summer travelers occurs—the rainy season in August begins. For three days it rains steadily—Asheville appearing the while depressingly dirty and dull—and it is only on the fourth day that the clouds disperse a little, the carriages are ordered, and we prepare to set forth.

The order of our going is soon arranged. Sylvia, Charley, and Mr. Lanier, are on horseback; Aunt Markham, Rupert, and I, together with John, fill the phaeton; Eric—who cannot endure that any one else should hold the reins while he sits by—drives the "jersey," which serves as a baggage-wagon, with Harrison (its nominal driver) by his side.

"So you have lent Charley your horse?" I say to him just before we start. "It is more than he deserves after having refused to bring his own."

"I thought it would be too cruel to sentence the poor fellow to the carriage, with Lanier by Sylvia's side," he answers, "but, of course, we will vary our modes of travel. If it does not rain, I shall invite you to share my seat in the baggage-wagon, by way of relief from the carriage."

The clouds, however, are determined that this pleasure shall be indefinitely deferred. As we drive down the long, muddy hill that leads out of Asheville, we observe that they hang low on the mountains—always a threatening sign—and, before we have traveled three miles, a white rain is upon us. Much to her disgust, Sylvia is forced to enter the carriage, while Rupert mounts her horse; there is a general enveloping in water-proof cloaks and coats, a consultation as to whether we shall turn back, a unanimous vote to go on, and a resolute setting forward in the

teeth of the storm. It does not last very long; then there is a slight interlude: the clouds cease to rain, though they still curtain the sky in watery grayness. We are by this time immediately on the banks of the river, following that famous "Buncombe turnpike" which for more than fifty years was the great highway of travel between North Carolina and the Southwestern States. Originally an Indian trail, it has been and still remains the most picturesque road in the mountains. The fall of the river from Asheville to the Warm Springs—a distance of thirty-six miles—is seven hundred feet, from which the rapidity of its current may be conceived, and the height of the hills that overshadow it. As the gorge deepens they tower higher and yet higher, these beautiful mountains, sometimes round and swelling, at other times broken into cliff-like escarpments, with great masses of rock overhanging the narrow pass, and tropical verdure feathering every ledge and point. What studies of form and color are here for a future generation of artists, no words can fitly say. The road, as it stretches before us, is a picture never to be forgotten. On one side the whirling, tumultuous river leaps and races over the rocks that strew its channel; on the other steep hill-sides hang, dark with shade, green with ferns, damp with trickling streams. The road turns, and lo! there is a fairy glen, down which a white cascade comes leaping over its rocks "to join the brimming river," or a narrow stretch of valley, planted generally in tall, rustling corn.

We are not allowed to enjoy this charming beauty with any satisfaction to ourselves very long. The clouds gather again, the rain begins once more—this time with a steady, settled persistence, that gives no hope of abatement; and presently Rupert rides up to the side of the carriage.

"Brother Eric says we shall have to stop at Alexander's. He declares it is impossible to go on to the Springs in such weather as this. It is disagreeable to us, and hard on the horses."

"What a bore!" says Sylvia. "Alexander's is no doubt a very pleasant place, but when one starts with an object in view, one likes to attain it. What must be, must be, however. We should certainly see little of the gorge in this deluge."

Consequently we make our first halt at Alexander's, ten miles below Asheville. No

house of its kind is more widely known, or more deservedly popular, than this delightful hostelry. One secret of its charm is in the fact that there is no aping of the modern hotel about it. Nothing can be more quaint, more old-fashioned, more comfortable, and thoroughly unpretentious, than all its arrangements. A pleasant farm-house on a large scale, with a post-office and bowling-alley in front, a bridge crossing the river, and high, green hills rising abruptly around—this is Alexander's. Of the comfort of its lodging, the excellence of its table, thousands of travelers can speak. Withal it is a dreamy, restful place, where even the racing river grows tranquil, and, shut in by the great hills, one feels as if one might enjoy that repose of mind and body which is rare in this feverish age.

We find the house, as usual, full of guests—so full that Mr. Alexander demurs about receiving us; but, moved to compassion by the lowering skies and our drenched condition, finally agrees to stretch a point and take us in. This is something for which to be grateful, since there is no cessation in the steady down-pour for the rest of the day. The river—usually green as Niagara—sweeps by, a turbid flood, and sight-seeing is utterly out of the question. We play whist on the vine-draped piazza, go over to the bowling-alley under umbrellas, grow friendly with all the inmates of the house, study maps, and learn all about the great floods of the past spring.

"Almost all the bridges in this part of the country were swept away," says Mr. Alexander. "The bridge over Laurel went—you ford the river now—and the bridge at the Warm Springs over the French Broad."

"Do we ford there?" asks Aunt Markham, terrified at such a prospect.

"No, there is a ferry."

"One of the most inconvenient modes that ever was devised for crossing a stream," says Eric.

"I don't think we are likely to cross any streams in any manner very soon," says Charley. "The clouds look as if they had settled steadily to business, and meant to rain for a week."

This is depressingly true, yet, as we sit on the piazza late in the afternoon, there is a slight indication of breaking away. The rain "holds up," as country people say; a

glow of some faint, indescribable kind begins to light up the vapory heavens and turbid river-stretch. When we come out from tea the scene has become beautiful. Far down the river a primrose tint in the west shines through the green foliage, and the clouds are rolling away from the eastern heavens. Every thing is dripping with moisture; but, equipping ourselves with water-proofs and overshoes, we go out on the bridge. It is impossible to describe the fresh loveliness of the scene as we stand with the turbulent, swollen river flowing underneath in long, swirling ripples, and watch the light die out of that portion of the west which we see through the river-gap. The clouds change their shapes and aspects momentarily—now watery gray, as they have been all day, now white as snow-drifts against a dark-blue sky. Solemn and stately the great hills inclose us, with their aspect of eternal, melancholy calm, and from all the defiles white mists are rising.

Something in the picture touches Sylvia. She turns from Ralph Lanier to where Charley stands leaning over the wet railing and whistling softly; laying her hand on his arm:

"You told me first about the French Broad," she says, "but I did not fancy it was half so beautiful as this."

"As this!" repeats Charley. "Why, this is nothing. The grandeur of the gorge does not begin until four or five miles below here."

"Well," she says, with a laugh, "it is pleasant to think that something better is coming—but this is good enough. Charley, that looks like a very pleasant road along the river-bank yonder. Can we not walk a little?"

"Certainly," answers Charley, with an alacrity he would not be likely to display if any one else made the same suggestion. "You'll find it rather damp, but if you have on overshoes—"

"Oh, yes, overshoes and a water-proof. Come! I don't want to go back to the house to play whist and be bullied by everybody round the table for not leading trumps."

She takes his arm, and they start, but Mr. Lanier in his anxiety cannot forbear entering a protest.

"You are surely not going to walk on the side of the river, Miss Sylvia," he says

"You've no idea how wet it is—you will certainly take cold.—Kenyon, this is very imprudent—"

"Very good of you to consider my health," says Charley. "I am afraid I *may* take a sore-throat, or something of the kind; but when a lady gives an invitation; you know it is impossible to refuse."

"Aunt Markham will take my hand at whist, Mr. Lanier," says Sylvia's gay, mischievous voice. Then they walk away, and we soon see their figures strolling along the winding road by the river-bank.

Eric laughs at the vexed expression which, even in the dim light, we see on Mr. Lanier's face as he watches them.

"Give her line, Ralph," he says, good-naturedly. "A fish like that is not landed at once—if, indeed, you are lucky enough to land her at all."

"I sometimes think, by Jove, that I never shall," says Mr. Lanier, with emphasis. "One minute she is as kind and gracious as could possibly be desired; the next she thrusts a fellow off at arm's length. I don't pretend to understand such women."

"They don't generally intend that you should understand them," says Eric, quietly.

After this we return to the house and play another game of whist—Aunt Markham taking Sylvia's hand, and calling Mr. Lanier sharply to account for all the blunders which he makes, and which owe their origin to a distracted mind. Whist-players know what concentration of thought this game demands, and poor Mr. Lanier's thoughts are following Sylvia up and down the wet river-side.

She comes in late, with wet boots and draggled skirts, but a pretty flush on her cheeks and light in her eyes. "We have been watching the moon rise," she hastens to assure Aunt Markham. "There is a bluff about a quarter of a mile down the river, which is perfectly lovely.—Are my feet wet? Well, yes—slightly so, but I am going to bed, so it does not matter. Good-night."

"One moment, Miss Sylvia!" cries Mr. Lanier, springing after her; but she flits away with a laugh and is gone.

The first sound I hear next morning is that of rain heavily falling, but by breakfast-time a few faint gleams of sunshine have appeared, and after breakfast we decide to order the carriages and make another effort to reach the Warm Springs. Half a dozen

amateur weather-prophets assure us that it will be a clear day. "The mists are rising, the clouds are breaking," they say. "By twelve o'clock you will have as much sun as you want, and perhaps a little more."

Cheered by these assurances we start. Eric and I in the wagon lead the way, the carriage and horsemen follow. But for the heaviness of the road the day would be delightful—a perfect day for traveling. Light veils of cloud obscure the sun, though now and then a burst of sunlight breaks forth and lights up the world with splendor. Three or four miles below Alexander's we enter on that part of the road which leads below the cliffs. They rise over our heads hundreds of feet, these beautiful, majestic heights, broken ledges and masses of rock, in every interstice of which great pines grow, and thickets of rhododendron flourish. In the dark shade, ferns, flowers, and mosses abound, together with trees of every variety, while down the hill-sides and over the rocks countless streams come leaping in foam and spray.

We make slow progress here. It is impossible not to pause and linger at every step. The road, flecked with shadows, stretches before us, bounded on one side by the tumultuous river, overshadowed on the other by these inexpressibly picturesque escarpments. Sylvia descends from her horse, and, looping up her habit, climbs the rocks with almost childlike delight—followed by her two attendants, who do not probably enjoy the scrambling so much. Yet a change has evidently come over Charley. Despite his indolence he has a genuine love of Nature, and it begins to assert itself. Lanier, on the contrary, would be plainly content to sit on his horse and say, "Really, very beautiful!"

"How little idea most people have of the grandeur of this country!" says Eric. "The pass of the Trosachs is nothing to this gorge of the French Broad—yet compare the renown of the one with the obscurity of the other."

"Yet the scenery of the French Broad is tame compared to some that is to be found in these mountains—and which is absolutely unknown," says Charley.

"Tame!" repeats Sylvia. "Are we always to remain below in the scale of comparison? Shall we never see any thing which has the distinction of being superlative?"

"Yes, you will stand on the Black Mountain and you will see Hickory-Nut Gap," Eric answers. "Those two things are superlative."

Since the day is wearing on, we cannot linger so long as we should like. Though our road is bounded by the narrow walls of the gorge through which the river forces its way, there is no monotony in the scenery. Every curve of the winding stream gives us a picture of new beauty—a picture essentially unlike any that we have seen before. As we advance, the mountains on each side rise higher, the stream grows wilder, the masses of rock which strew its channel are larger, sometimes piled in fantastic shapes with the water surging around and boiling under them, or forming islands covered with greenness.

Toward the middle of the day the sun shines out hotly—making our noonday rest, while we eat our luncheon, very pleasant. It



At Luncheon.

is while we are engaged in this manner, scattered over the rocks by the river-bank, under the shade of the trees, that to our surprise the stage, which we expected to meet much later in the day, comes driving past. Two or three voices hail the driver:

"Halloa!—from the Warm Springs already?"

Driver: "Haven't been to the Springs to-day—couldn't cross Laurel yesterday evening."

"Is it too high for fording?"

"Much too high."

"Do you think it is down by this time?"

"Can't tell—maybe."

Then the lumbering vehicle rattles on, and we look at each other.

"By George! here's a promising state of affairs!" says Mr. Lanier, twisting the ends of his black mustache.

"I've had my doubts about Laurel from the first," says Charley, taking another sandwich. "It's a dangerous-looking stream even at low water."

"O Eric," cries Aunt Markham, with perturbation on her countenance, "let us go back to Alexander's."

"I'm opposed to turning back," says Rupert, who is balancing himself in a precarious manner on a tree which hangs over the water. "If we can't cross Laurel, we can camp out."

"Well said, Rupert!" cries Sylvia. "I have always desired two things ardently—to camp out all night, and to be lost in the mountains. If we can compass the first, I shall have hopes of the last."

"Sylvia, how can you talk so foolishly!" says Aunt Markham.—"Eric, what do you mean to do?"

"To go on, mother," answers Eric. "These mountain-streams run down as fast as they rise. We can't reach Laurel before late afternoon, and it will be low enough to cross by that time."

Two things which are very essential in a leader Eric possesses—coolness and resolution. Many men under such circumstances would say to the party, "What shall we do?" and endless discussion would be the result. Eric simply announces what he means to do, and even Aunt Markham submits. "You'll promise that if there is any danger you won't take us in!" she says; and, when he says, "I promise that most positively," she is content.

Our luncheon over, we start again. A few miles brings us to Marshall, the seat of Madison County. A more singularly-located village cannot well be imagined. It is situated immediately on the river, in a valley not more than a quarter of a mile wide, with sheer, steep hills rising abruptly behind, and the river in front.

"The streams in this part of the country cannot rise like ours," I say to Eric, "or else Marshall would be submerged twice a year at least. Think of the Yadkin, that rose last spring forty feet!"

"The French Broad never rises like that," he answers; "it runs off too rapidly. A bridge has been swept away here, but I doubt if the river came up to the town. We'll ask."

We do ask, and are told that it came up to the first row of houses—about ten feet above its usual level—but rose no farther. The bridge went like a thread, and a pretty, cultivated island lying in the middle of the stream was entirely overflowed. We try to obtain some information about Laurel here, but nobody knows any thing. As we drive out of the town, a darkly-threatening cloud is hanging over the mountains, and we hear "sounds of thunder afar." We pause at the toll-gate, where a woman comes out to receive the toll, superintended by a cadaverous-looking man, evidently ill with fever, who is lying on a mattress in an upper piazza. Of him, also, we solicit information of Laurel.

"I haven't seen nobody from there to-day," he responds, "but the stage came back last night without crossing. If it hasn't rained any more on the head-waters, the river may be down by this time. There's an old man living there that'll show you the ford. Travelin' fur?"

"Down to the Springs," answers Eric, touching the horses; and on we go.

Just below Marshall the river makes a magnificent curve, sweeping with a bold and beautiful stretch around the base of the wooded cliffs that rise abruptly from its verge, and from this point the grandeur of the gorge is unmatched, and absolutely beyond description. The scenes grow wilder with every mile. Our ears are filled with the roar of the tumultuous river that lashes itself to fury among the rocks of every conceivable form that seem trying to bar its way. Much of the road is made in the bed of the stream, and, as we wind around the cliffs that jut out here and there, it is always with the devout hope that we may not come face to face with some other vehicle. In such a case it is impossible to see what either party would or could do. We are spared any thing of the kind, however, and so we go on, feeling as if

we were leaving civilization altogether behind, and plunging deeper and deeper into the heart of primeval Nature. The fact that we meet no travelers strikes us.

"I am afraid Laurel is up," Eric says, doubtfully, "else we should have met somebody from beyond there."

One feature of the day's travel also impresses us—the number of people who are engaged in fishing. At least once in the course of every half mile we pass a group of men and boys employed in this manner. Our



Fishermen.

curiosity is roused at last. Why should the whole population of the French Broad be devoting themselves to fishing on this special day? We ask two or three, but receive little satisfaction. Unless approached with some tact, your mountaineer is apt to prove sulky and non-committal.

The road is so rough and so muddy that it is impossible to travel fast, and the afternoon is more than half gone before we hear that we are nine miles from Laurel, of the state of which we have not yet received any definite information.

"Eric," says Charley, riding up to the side of the phaeton which Eric is driving, "I have grave doubts about that river ahead

of us. If we can't cross it, where do you propose to spend the night? There is not a tolerable place between the Springs and Alexander's."

"We can camp out," says Sylvia, riding up on the other side.—"Eric, pray let us do that.—Aunt Markham, wouldn't you rather sleep in the carriage than in such houses as we have passed?"

"I think I should," says Aunt Markham, "but I would rather cross Laurel than do either."

Charley shakes his head as he falls back. He is plainly not sanguine about Laurel. The case is desperate now, however; it is too far to go back—we must go on. Two or three showers have passed over us, but we are inured to wettings by this time, and do not mind them; massed clouds are before and behind, but we scarcely glance at them. On we drive for three miles farther, rugged cliffs hanging over us, a rocky road below, the rushing river by our side. Every thing around is so wild that unconsciously our spirits begin to fail a little. What if Laurel should be up! where and how shall we spend the night?

"I think there is a storm coming over, Eric," says Aunt Markham, presently, from the back of the phaeton. "Had we not better put up the top?"

Eric turns, partly to look at the clouds, partly to assist in pulling up the top. In doing so, he fails to avoid one of the rocks of which the road is full. Crash against it goes the phaeton-wheel; there is a loud snap under our feet, and, as Eric pulls up the horses, he says:

"By George, there goes a spring!"

The equestrians are lingering in the rear, but, seeing our abrupt halt, Charley comes up at a canter.

"Ride on and stop those fellows in front," says Eric, as he comes abreast of us, "and tell John to bring a rope here.—I am sorry to say you must all get out of the carriage.—Rupert, come and unharness the horses."

We alight, and Aunt Markham seats herself on a rock with an expression of countenance that might move a statue to amusement. Disgust, despair, consternation, unutterable resignation to any thing that may occur—all this is so plainly visible on her face that I go to the river-bank—about two feet distant—to enjoy a private laugh.

Meanwhile, Sylvia and her escort appear on the scene.

"Spring broken?" says Mr. Lanier, looking almost as much concerned as Aunt Markham. "What luck!"

"I've been 'feard of that spring all along, Mass Eric," says John, coming up with a coil of rope over his shoulder.

"Well, the worst has come," says Eric, "so now let us go to work and remedy it.—Charley, lend a hand here."

While Rupert holds the horses—which have been taken out of the carriage—and Eric, Charley, and John, bandage the broken spring, Mr. Lanier sits on his horse and contemptively pulls his mustache. He is evidently of the opinion that misfortune has marked us for its own, and that traveling on the French Broad has its disadvantages.

Suddenly Aunt Markham extends her hand like a tragedy-queen, and points up the river.

"The rain is coming," she says. "Will somebody bring me a water-proof?"

Mr. Lanier springs from his horse, and goes in search of this garment—not an instant too soon. We have scarcely time to envelop ourselves before the rain is upon us. There comes a blaze of lightning, a volleying peal of thunder, then the clouds empty themselves in a white, blinding sheet that almost takes away our breath, and promises to soak us to the skin.

"O Alice, isn't this dreadful?" says Sylvia, whose taste for adventure begins to be a little damped. As for Aunt Markham, she thinks that forbearance has ceased to be a virtue, and she cries that she must and will get into the carriage.

"I cannot sit here in a pool of water!" she says. "Eric, I shall take my death of cold—I am sure of it."

"We'll be ready for you in a minute, mother," says Eric, working like a Trojan.

In the midst of all this, a horseman unexpectedly appears, riding around a cliff just ahead of us, where the river makes a bend. He pauses—naturally surprised at the scene before him. It is by no means common to find parties of our description on the French Broad in a pouring rain. We hail him with our usual question:

"Can you tell us how far we are from Laurel?"

"Four miles," he answers, staring harder. "Broken a spring?"

"Yes. Is Laurel up?"

"Pretty high. You are not thinking about crossing it?"

"We are thinking exactly that," says Eric, turning round, "if the stream isn't too high. Have you crossed it?"

"No—it's beyond crossing, except in a

fast—oh, don't you think we *might* cross it if we went on?"

The new-comer—who in face and manner is more decided and intelligent than any other native of the region we have met—glances at her, and then points to the tossing, turbulent current of the French Broad.

"You could just as soon drive to that rock yonder," he says, indicating a black,



The Shower.

canoe. "I'm just from there, though. I live on Laurel, five miles from the mouth. The river has been past fording for five days. It is running eight or ten feet deep now, and will swim a horse."

"By Jove!" says Mr. Lanier. "Nobody else utters a word. We are all stunned, and we gaze at the messenger of evil tidings with a mixture of indignation and appeal."

"It can't be!" cries Sylvia, entreatingly. "They say mountain-streams run down very

jagged point two-thirds of the distance across the river. "Laurel is fully that wide, and fully that swift."

We look at each other in dismay. What is to be said, what is to be done? Torrents of rain are pouring on us, lightning is flashing around, and thunder bellowing above. We are in the wildest part of the wild river-gorge, with Laurel "deep enough to swim a horse" in front, and Alexander's eighteen miles behind! *

CHAPTER VI.

"A chieftain, to the Highlands bound,
Cries, 'Boatman, do not tarry!
And I'll give thee a silver pound,
To row us o'er the ferry.'"

"ERIC," cries Aunt Markham, with strong symptoms of hysterics, "come here this instant and tell me if we are all to be drowned!"

Eric is undutiful enough to disregard this appeal. He walks instead up to the man who has warned us, and who, with supreme indifference to the rain, is sitting on his horse watching our proceedings with great interest.

"If you are sure there is no possibility of our crossing Laurel," he says, "can you tell me any house within a moderate distance where we can spend the night?"

"Eric!" cries Aunt Markham again.

The prospect of spending the night in any one of the houses which are found commonly through the country is nearly as appalling as the idea of being drowned.

But Eric knows what is best for us, and goes on inflexibly:

"I must find some shelter for these ladies," he says. "Where is the nearest house?"

"About a mile back," the other answers. "You can get accommodation there, I expect. It's the house of a friend of mine. There's no other that I know of nearer than five or six miles."

"John, turn the carriage as soon as you put in the horses," says our commanding officer.—"Charley, ride forward and see that Harrison does the same with the wagon."

So it is settled: John turns the carriage—a dangerous matter this on the narrow road—then we crowd in and shield ourselves as well as we can from the driving rain that comes in our faces in sheets of spray. So we start back. But our progress is slow. Streams that were rivulets an hour before are leaping torrents now, with currents so strong and swift that it is as much as our horses can do to pull us through. Once the danger seems so imminent that we may be swept into the river that Aunt Markham utters a scream.

Sylvia only clasps my hand tightly, and, when we reach the bank in safety, she says, "What must Laurel be!"

All our fancy for adventurous camping-out is dissipated by the blinding, soaking rain. We feel that any shelter will be wel-

come, no matter how rough it may be. And the shelter to which we presently come is very rough. Yet the house has plainly seen better days. It is a two-story frame-building—once, no doubt, a well-kept farm-house—situated a little back from the road. Two or three men are seated in the piazza. One comes forward, and, when Eric says, "Can you take us in for the night?" answers, with a doubtful glance at our number, "Well, I reckon so."

We do not wait for the slow assent to spring out and take refuge in the piazza. Then we utter a long sigh of relief. After all, it is pleasant to have a roof over one's head! Our host leads us into a large, barn-like room, with several smaller ones opening from it. "I'll kindle some fire in a minute for you to dry yourselves," he says.

We certainly stand in need of drying. Mermaids could scarcely be more wet. Wherever we stand or sit, a pool of water soon settles. We take off our water-proofs and shawls, and stretch them on chairs, laughing the while at our plight. Aunt Markham plainly thinks this mirth very ill-timed. She looks round with a shudder as she sits, majestic and dripping, in the middle of the room—but she says nothing. Words are too weak to express her feelings.

Presently a fire is roaring up the great chimney, and, by the time the gentlemen come to inquire how we have fared, we are restored to our normal condition of dryness and warmth. Nevertheless, flasks are produced, and potatoes insisted upon. "It is the only way to keep from taking cold," says Eric, imperatively.

"Your wishes are gratified, Miss Sylvia," says Ralph Lanier, with rather an air of reproach. "You were desiring adventures—here they are."

"Do you consider me the Jonah who has brought all this ill-luck?" she asks, laughing. "In that case I ought to be thrown overboard—ought I not? The river is convenient for any thing of that kind."

The violence of the rain abates before very long, and we go out on the piazza to look around. The prospect is cheerless in the extreme. The house has a dispirited air of decay, and rose-trees have grown to a tangled thicket in front. At the end of the piazza two young men are talking to our host. Charley says that they are from South Caro-

lina, and are on a walking-tour through the mountains.

"They came from the Springs to-day," he adds, "and crossed Laurel in a canoe. We met them, if you remember, just before our break-down."

As the rain abates, our spirits sink. Let it abate ever so much, we have still the certainty of an aimless afternoon and comfortless night before us. No hope of crossing Laurel before the next day, no possible chance of returning to Alexander's. Suddenly, however, a cry is raised that somewhat cheers us: "The stage is coming!"

"By Jove!" says Mr. Lanier, "I felt sure that fellow was deceiving us about Laurel."

"That fellow" has also arrived by this time, and, in a very damp condition, is seated near. It is a chance whether or not he hears this grateful speech. Fortunately, the attention of everyone is fastened on the stage, which comes into sight—empty! We salute the driver with a cry.

"Are you going over Laurel?"

Driver. "Mean to try." Then he nods to the man who warned us: "How are you, George?"

George shakes his head.

"You can't cross," he says.

"I'll take the mail to the banks any way," responds the other, driving on.

"If you find that you can cross, *please* come back for us," cries Sylvia, eagerly.

"He's not likely to cross," say the men at the other end of the piazza.

Mr. Lanier shrugs his shoulders impatiently. "There's no relying on a word these people say," he remarks. "But the bridge should have been rebuilt long ago. It is infamous for travelers to be delayed in this

manner. What a place this is for ladies to spend the night!"

"Don't trouble yourself about us," replies Sylvia, nonchalantly. "We do not mind a little hardship; but I am afraid *you* have made a grave mistake. Had you not better turn round even yet and go to the White Sulphur and Saratoga?"

The young man colors.

"I was not thinking of myself," he says. "Of course it does not matter to me—at least not very much."

"Has anybody brought a pack of cards along?" asks Charley, sauntering up. "Let us have a game of euchre."



"Up we spring, and rush to the edge of the piazza."

In the midst of this, and just as Sylvia is playing an exciting "lone hand," there is another cry: "Here comes a man who has crossed Laurel!"

Up we spring, and rush to the edge of the

piazza. A man driving two horses in a jersey wagon is stopped by a storm of tumultuous questions.

"Yes, I'm from the other side of Laurel," he replies.

"Forded the river?" asks the incredulous chorus.

"No—ferried it in a canoe. I've been water-bound on the other side three days, and I couldn't stand it any longer, so I took my wagon-body off the wheels, slipped it on the canoe, and swam the horses over."

"Eureka!" cries Eric, striking one hand on the other; "that is an idea for us! What has been done can be done again. If Laurel is still up to-morrow, I'll take the carriages over in that way."

"You'll run a great risk if you do," says Mr. Lanier, who evidently does not know what reckless thing may be proposed or executed next.

"A fig for the risk!" says Charley. "I'd quite as soon cross that way as another."

"And I would *rather* cross that way!" cries Sylvia. "What fun it will be!"

Mr. Lanier looks grave. Crossing swollen streams in a canoe is not his idea of fun.

"Let us hope the stream may be down by to-morrow," he says.

We return to our game of euchre, but I cannot forget the width and general appearance of the wagon which was said to have been brought over on a canoe.

"Eric," I say, "these people must be talking about a boat—a constructed boat. They can't possibly mean a dug-out."

"Our friend here will tell us," says Eric.

Then he turns to our first acquaintance—the man who lives five miles from the mouth of Laurel.

"Is that craft of which you are all talking a dug-out?" he asks.

"Yes, it's a dug-out—hollowed from the trunk of a tree," is the reply.

"The tree must surely have grown in California," says Sylvia.

"No, madam," is the answer. "I can find plenty of chestnuts ten feet in diameter on the Walnut Mountains just below here, and I'm almost sure I could find walnuts of the same size."

"There was a dug-out on the river here," says our host, chiming in, "that I saw one day hold five men and a mule—and could a' held more."

"There is no doubt of one thing," says Eric—"this is one of the most splendidly-timbered countries on the face of the globe."

"You don't know what it is until you go out on the mountains," says Mr. George. "There's hardly a known tree that doesn't grow here—and grow to the finest size. You'd not believe me if I were to tell you of what height and diameter I have seen the white pine."

"Yes, we would," says Charley. "We are prepared to be enlightened, and ready to believe any thing."

A few more tree-stories are told, and then we ask the cause of the fishing mania which has seized all the population of the French Broad.

"Those were not more than the pickets and outposts that you saw," says our informant. "The main body of the fishing army is below here. I passed at least twenty in four miles to-day. Some of the fellows sat up fishing all night, and I know three men who only caught two fish among 'em—and those were cats."

"What's the idea?"

"Oh, well, it's too wet to do any thing else, and they think the fish will bite better because the river's muddy."

By the aid of conversation and cards the afternoon and evening drag through. One shower succeeds another in the most rapid and disheartening succession, so that it is impossible to leave the house even for a short walk, and no one is sanguine enough to speak of "clearing off."

"We might as well go back to Asheville," says Aunt Markham, who regards our prospects in the darkest manner.

"Not without an effort to do otherwise," says Eric. "I don't choose to be baffled by Fate and the Laurel."

The day has been fatiguing, and we all retire early. Of the lodging and fare which we find at this wayside house it is best to say no more than that the people gave us their best, and seemed honestly anxious to do all in their power to please us.

About nine o'clock the stage passes back and reports Laurel still rising. We are, therefore, cheered when, on waking the next morning, we hear the rain coming down "in bucketfuls," as Sylvia despondently remarks.

"We shall have to stay here all day," she says. "I feel sure of it. We cannot

even go back to Alexander's, for the creeks are up between here and there. Oh, dear! Were ever people out for a pleasure-trip more badly treated by the weather?"

When we leave our room, Charley is the first person to meet us, with the pleasant sunshine of his face undimmed by the gloomy outlook. Surely an equable temperament is one of the greatest blessings in the world—especially in a traveling-companion.

"Not for gold or precious stones would I leave my mountain home,"

he sings, gayly. "I hope you are in better spirits than Lanier is this morning, Sylvia. If matters go on at the present rate, I am afraid he will commit suicide or go melancholy mad. It is a pity to see a man have so little philosophy. Can't you cheer him a little?"

"I haven't the least disposition to try," says Sylvia. "Do any of us like the delay?—is it anybody's fault? I am disgusted with Mr. Lanier, and I wish he had gone to a watering-place where he might dance the German to his heart's content, instead of joining our party."

"Who is accountable for his joining it?" says Charley. But I do not think he is ill-pleased by the young lady's petulance.

We go out on the piazza. The sky is a leaden curtain, the rain is pouring in torrents, the road is black mud and water, the river is a turbid flood. There is a sheer wall of cliff and forest opposite, along the base of which the impetuous current sweeps.

"What are you going to do, Eric?" we ask, as that gentleman comes up.

"Nothing, at present," he answers. "What can a man do in the face of such a down-pour as this? By nine o'clock there will, probably, be some signs of clearing. Then I will go to Laurel and see what the chances are for our getting across."

By nine o'clock there are some signs of clearing. A few faint gleams of sunshine appear, and the mists begin to rise from the mountains. Horses are brought out, and the gentlemen, with the exception of Mr. Lanier, start for the banks of Laurel, which is said to be all the more dangerous—to have all the more force in its current—because it is higher than the French Broad, into which it empties.

The morning passes in very dull fashion. Aunt Markham settles herself to a novel.

Sylvia and I go out and stroll—wade, perhaps, would give a more correct idea of the road—along the river-bank, attended by Mr. Lanier. I soon grow tired of playing the part of "third wheel to the cart," as the Germans say, and return to the house, leaving the others established in a cool, damp nook under some large trees that sweep the river with their bending boughs. An hour or two pass. No sign of the return of the horsemen; Aunt Markham grows uneasy, and suggests that they may have been drowned. Sylvia does not stir from her seat by the river; Mr. Lanier is talking earnestly—so earnestly that I feel a malicious inclination to go and break up the *tête-à-tête*. I have taken an unaccountable dislike to this young gentleman, despite his good looks and his well-filled purse. "Wae's me for Prince Charley," I think—and then I see Prince Charley coming at a canter along the road.

"Good news!" he says, as he draws up his horse. "Laurel is falling, and will be low enough by the afternoon for you to be ferried over in a canoe. Eric has made all the arrangements. I've seen the boat, and there is not the least danger."

"Are you sure of that?" asks Aunt Markham, tremulously. She is divided between her dislike to staying where she is and her terror of crossing in a canoe. "I never was in a dug-out," she says, "but I've seen them often. They rock horribly, and will upset at a touch."

"Not this one," says Charley. "Though a dug-out, it is two feet and a half wide."

The sun by this time is shining brilliantly, and with great heat. We take dinner; then the carriages are brought out, and the almost endless business of stowing away our luggage begins. Besides the trunks there are satchels and baskets, boxes of grasses, books of ferns, and an unlimited number of wraps. Aunt Markham declines to allow the last to be strapped together. "It is useless," she says. "We shall need them before we have gone a mile."

Despite this foreboding prophecy, the afternoon remains clear, and we see the wild beauty of the gorge for the first time to advantage. The air is like crystal, and a glory of sunlight streams on the river with its masses of rock, and the mountains that overshadow it. In the five miles that lie between our place of lodging and the banks of Lau-

rel, the picturesque loveliness changes and deepens constantly. The river grows more and more tumultuous, and its waves wear caps of foam like the breakers of the ocean, as they plunge in stormy rapids over its hidden rocks. Rugged cliffs hang over us, fringed with ferns and mosses; verdure-clad mountains rise from the other bank; leaping cascades tumble down the rocky glens and dash across our way—there are pictures on every side that would repay the lover of Na-

then it takes half of the channel, and the clear and the turbid current flow onward side by side.

The bridge which was swept away crossed the stream near its mouth; but the ford is a little higher, and to this we drive. There is a cabin on the other side, from which, in answer to several halloas, the ferryman issues. The canoe, in which we are to make the passage is moored on the other side, and at this Aunt Markham gazes doubtfully.

"John," she says to her coachman, whom she considers less likely to run dangerous risks than Eric, in whose vocabulary fear is a word unknown—"John, do you think that boat is safe? I suppose we can cross in it, but how about the carriages and the horses? Don't you think it might be better for you to remain on this side until the river goes down?"

This is a proposal which does not meet with John's approval. No one has a better appreciation of good lodging and good fare than the negro of the old *régime*. "There ain't no danger at all ef we takes the carriages off the wheels," he replies. "We can hold 'em steady on the boat, and the horses can swim easy enough."

"Oh, it will all be easy," says Eric, coming to the carriage-door.

"There is no reason to be nervous, mother. I am sorry that it is necessary you should alight.—Every thing must be taken out of here, John—luggage, cushions, every thing."

"This is—dreadful!" says Aunt Markham, with a gasp, after she has been deposited on the road-side in the blazing heat of the sun, with satchels, novels, and baskets, strewed around in wild confusion.

"I call it jolly," says Rupert, who is prancing about on Cecil, and getting as much as possible in everybody's way.



Laurel Run.

ture or the artist for any hardship or fatigue that could possibly be encountered in reaching this land of almost unknown beauty.

Presently we see a broad, green stream flowing in front of us, and the horses are drawn up on the banks of Laurel. Notwithstanding the late heavy rains, there is no tinge of mud in the clear water of this mountain-river, and we appreciate the strength of its current when we see that it sweeps directly across the French Broad before the latter river can change its course. Even

"Don't ride that horse over me, Rupert," cries Aunt Markham, retreating in terror, and



"There ain't no danger at all."

making convulsive efforts to scramble up the steep hill behind her.

"I must say that I consider this a very great risk," observed Mr. Lanier, climbing to where I have perched on the hill-side, under the shade of a large walnut-tree. "I shall not be surprised if Markham loses one or both of his carriages, and gets some of the horses drowned. In my opinion the river is still too high and too swift to be crossed with safety in any way."

"Suppose you stay on this side, then?" I cannot resist saying. "Yonder comes the ferryman. He seems to have no difficulty about bringing the boat over."

"What a pleasant way of crossing!" says Sylvia's voice below. She is standing with Charley on the bank of the stream, while

Eric, who lends a hand to every thing, is assisting Harrison to take off the trunks, and John and Rupert are taking out the horses. "What shall go over first?—a cargo of trunks, or a cargo of people?" says she, turning round as the boat touches the shore.

"You and I will go," says Charley. "Let us be the first to make the passage."

"The whole party may as well go," says Eric. "The boat is large enough."

"We don't want the whole party," says Sylvia. "We mean to cross by ourselves, with a trunk or two for ballast.—Harrison, bring mine here.—If I go to the bottom, let me at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I take my wardrobe along with me."

Two or three trunks are placed in the boat, Sylvia and Charley embark, Mr. Lanier the while looking on anxiously, and uttering one or two unheeded remonstrances; then the ferryman, who has been leaning on his pole, listening to every thing, with a broad grin on his dusky face, pushes off. The boat rocks on the swift current, but he manages it with great skill, and, when they are half-way across, Sylvia's gay tones—she has taken off her gloves, and is dabbling with both hands in the clear-tinted water—float back to us.

"O Charley, shall you ever forget the Laurel? Isn't this delicious!"

"What strange ideas of enjoyment some people have!" says Mr. Lanier, who is seated on the roots of a tree, fanning himself. "I don't think I shall ever forget the Laurel ;



Crossing the Laurel.

but, as for seeing any thing delicious in such a business—"

The rest of the trunks, Aunt Markham and myself, accompanied by this gentleman, cross next. Eric and Rupert remain behind to superintend the sending over of the carriages. We are landed in safety, despite one or two alarms on Aunt Markham's part. "O—h!" she says, in prolonged gasp, every time that the boat gives a lurch—and dug-outs are by no means the steadiest crafts in the world. Mr. Lanier says nothing. He only sits on a trunk and looks grave. He is not afraid—as he has taken some trouble to explain—but he disapproves of running reckless risks, and he objects to getting his feet wet in a muddy canoe.

Sylvia and Charley welcome us gayly. There is a prettily-shaded spring, not more than five steps from the river, where they have seated themselves, and opened the lunch-basket—filled at Alexander's, and not emptied yet. There is a bottle of claret which Charley is opening with his knife. "We drink to the passage of the Laurel!" he says; "may our future adventures be as pleasant!"

One or two of the party object to this sentiment—but they drink the claret. The children of the ferryman come in detachments to stare at us and the proceedings on the other bank. A hungry-looking, soft-eyed hound draws near and is fed generously by Sylvia. We talk and laugh and watch the carriages being brought over in pieces—first the bodies, then the wheels—and applaud the gallant horses that come out dripping and shining from their bath. Even Mr. Lanier begins to admit that there is some pleasure in all this. Walnut Mountain rises superbly behind us; the clear waters of Laurel sweep swiftly in front; the wild, deep gorge down which the latter flows is in shadow; while the afternoon sunlight falls broadly on the rushing French Broad.

"If life were all like this," says Sylvia, leaning back against a rock, her hat off, her pretty hair in a curly tangle, "what a charming thing it would be!"

"You seemed to think it particularly charming last night," says Rupert, with an explosion of boyish laughter. He has come to refresh himself after his arduous exertions—his hat is on the back of his head, his face aflame with color. "Did you see what trouble we had to get Brimmer into the water?" he asks. "He knew as well as I did that he

would have to swim, and he didn't fancy the idea."

The passage of the Laurel, with the attendant trouble of putting the carriages together again, and reharnessing the horses, occupies two hours. It was three o'clock when we paused on its farther bank; it is five when Eric at last says, "All ready," and we prepare to start for the Springs.

"Good-by, Wash," says Charley, addressing the ferryman, who, after eleven trips across the river, seems disposed to think that rest from labor is sweet. "May you live a thousand years, and may your shadow never grow less! You have our blessing, and, if you should ever be called upon to do a thing of this kind again, you'll understand the proper method."

"Yes, sah—thanky, sah," responds Wash, with a grin.

The drive to the Springs in the lovely afternoon is a marvel of delight. It is a peculiarity of this road that one is never able to determine with any degree of certainty what part of it is most beautiful. Yet, if it were necessary to decide, the palm might be awarded to that portion which lies beyond the waters of Laurel. There are, if possible, more variety, more wildness, more blended majesty and loveliness in these four miles than are to be found on any other part of the river. The Walnut Mountains—a range of splendid heights, rising to a ridge that stands for miles, level as a prairie, against the sky—inclose the gorge, while the cliff-like rocks that line the road assume some of their most imposing and picturesque forms. It is here, also, that the famous islands of the French Broad—in which Cherokee traditions placed a siren who lured hunters to destruction by the sweetness of her voice—appear like spots of fairy verdure on the rushing current. Rocks, islets, drooping foliage, glancing water, golden sunshine streaming on all the grand vistas and curves of beauty—how can one write of these things in terms that shall not seem exaggerated to those who have never looked on them?

Presently we reach Deep Water—where the river, narrowed between two walls of shelving rock, is said to be ninety feet deep, and flows without a sound, almost without apparent motion. Released from this confinement, it whirls more madly than ever over a magnificent ledge of broken rock, and

parts around Mountain Island. When it unites again, it is more quiet. We follow one more sweeping bend, and the lovely valley of the Warm Springs is before us.

CHAPTER VII.

"The velvet grass seems carpet meet
For the light fairies' lively feet;
Yon tufted knoll with daisies strown,
Might make proud Oberon a throne;
While hidden in the thicket nigh
Puck should brood o'er his frolic sly;
And where profuse the wood-vetch clings
Round ash and elm in verdant rings,
Its pale and azure pencilled flower
Should canopy Titania's bower."

It is not possible to imagine a stronger sense of contrast than that of which we are conscious on coming to this gay watering-place out of the wild gorge through which we have passed, and after the rough life of which we have had a glimpse. We feel as if we had entered by magic into another world. Here is a large hotel, with all the appliances of civilization; well-dressed people in every direction on the piazzas and lawns; stir, movement, and all that air of do-nothing gayety which pervades such places.

No summer resort in the country possesses greater advantages than the Warm Springs—if these advantages were only made the most of. Even now, despite the constant annoyance which bad management causes, the place is very popular, especially among the people of Tennessee and the Gulf States, who go there in numbers. Nature has certainly done every thing for it. The great hills recede, forming a beautiful basin. There is a green, well-shaded lawn in front of the hotel, at the foot of which the French Broad sweeps, chanting its everlasting refrain, while on the other side bold cliffs and mountains rise. In the rear of the hotel flows Spring Creek, one of the brightest and loveliest of mountain-streams. It runs down a picturesque gorge in crystal rapids and falls, with the laurel-clad cliffs towering so sheer and steep on each side that it is only by springing from rock to rock in the bed of the stream that one is able to explore its wild beauty. The warm springs are large pools that bubble up near the river, and range in heat from 98° to 102° Fahr. They are almost of miraculous virtue for rheumatism and neuralgia, and one

sees helpless cripples who have the entire use of all their limbs in the bath, when out of it they cannot move hand or foot. The worst cases of rheumatism are always alleviated by these waters, and many persons are wholly cured.

We cross the river in a ferry-boat—the bridge not having been yet rebuilt—and in doing so are the objects of many stares from a party of equestrians who are waiting on the other side. At a place of this kind newcomers are always certain of being stared at—generally in a very ill-bred manner—but on this occasion there is more than ordinary excuse for the starers. Evidently they are at a loss to imagine where we can possibly have come from. They know that Laurel is "up," for the stage from Asheville has not crossed since Monday, and this is Thursday. As we approach the bank, we hear them exchanging wonders and conjectures.

"The waters must be down," says one.

"Of course the stage will come to-night," remarks another.

"We could assure them to the contrary, if we chose," says Sylvia. "Our boatman told us, you know, that the stage cannot possibly cross until to-morrow—if then."

We drive into the grounds and up to the door of the hotel with the air of people who feel that they have a right to make a sensation.

Our appearance certainly excites a great deal of wonder and interest among the lounging groups on the long piazza.

"From Asheville?" says the astonished clerk who opens the carriage-door. "How is it possible you've crossed Laurel? The stage hasn't been here in a week."

"People can generally accomplish what they want to do," says Eric. "The stage-drivers are probably not so anxious to cross as we were. Here we are, and we want good rooms immediately."

Thanks to this young gentleman's somewhat arbitrary energy, the good rooms—and they are excellent ones—are obtained. In this respect we are more fortunate than many others. Let people show any capability of being imposed upon, and hotel proprietors are commonly the people to take advantage of the fact.

"It is the most disagreeable feature of this place," says a gentleman a few days later, "that you can obtain nothing without such a great amount of unpleasant bullying."

Not alone at the Warm Springs, however, does such short-sighted policy prevail. Who that has traveled has not suffered often in this manner, and been wrought to indignation by the deception and imposition which the keepers of many places of resort delight to practise, and injure themselves more grievously than they know by practising them?

The rooms at the Warm Springs are admirably furnished, as far superior in size, comfort, and upholstery, to those of the famous Virginia White Sulphur as a first-class hotel is superior to an ordinary boarding-house. And the table is as good as can reasonably be desired. Sylvia, it is true, casts a discontented glance over the bill-of-fare, and remarks that she sees no mention of venison or pheasants—but Eric and Charley laugh at her.

"You'd like a bear-steak, also, wouldn't you?" the latter asks. "You must go a little farther from cut-glass and damask before you find those things, *ma belle*."

"Is there no game around here?" asked Mr. Lanier. "There ought to be."

"There is none for amateur hunters," answers Eric. "I was here for a week last summer, and I soon saw how the thing was managed. A party of gentlemen want a deer-hunt. Being ignorant of the country, and having no dogs, they engage some of the mountaineers to 'drive' for them. These fellows regard the deer as their monopoly, so they station the strangers at certain stands, then they take the dogs and drive the deer in the opposite direction, receive their pay in the evening, and have probably also a deer which has been killed by one of their own number. After trying this lively amusement for a few days, the would-be hunters are generally disgusted, and firmly persuaded that there is no such thing as game in the mountains."

"Is there no chance of a stranger ever killing a deer, then?" asks Mr. Lanier.

"Not unless he is one of a party who know the country and drive for themselves. Even under those circumstances, however, game is scarce around here—so scarce that it is not worth hunting. I knew that, so I left my gun in Asheville. We shall not have a good deer-hunt until we go to Buck Forest—eh, Charley?"

"What is Buck Forest?" asks Sylvia.

"The jolliest place in the mountains,"

answers Charley. "Let that suffice until you go there."

It does not take us long to fall into the groove of watering-place life—the most absolutely idle and aimless life in the world. Who does not know the routine? A vast amount of lounging and promenading on piazzas, a considerable amount of flirtation under lawn-trees, much smoking on the part of the men, unlimited gossip on the part of the women, idle hours in the bowling-alley, idle hours by the river pretending to fish, idle hours of all in the ballroom, criticising faces and costumes, and dancing to poor music. This order of existence pleases only two of our party—Aunt Markham, who likes comfort and the baths, and Mr. Lanier, who likes comfort and society. Sylvia tolerates it—being young and pretty, and not adverse to admiration and belleship—but she wears a wistful look when the horses are brought out for a ride or drive, and she confides to me that she is longing to be "up and away" to the wild fair regions that lie yet unexplored before us. Eric and Charley make no secret of the fact that they are bored, and the latter relapses into his usual state of indolence—out of which our day or two of roughing temporarily roused him. He finds it too much trouble to contend with Ralph Lanier and half a dozen other old friends and new admirers for a share of Sylvia's society, so he calmly relinquishes all of it, and devotes himself to a dirltation with a pretty Memphis belle. I see them for hours together on the lawn—Charley lying lazily on the shadow-dappled grass—I find them by moonlight in remote nooks of the piazzas, and see them stroll away for long walks together. Sylvia says nothing, but her color heightens once or twice when some one remarks Mr. Kenyon's "devotion" to Miss Hollis, and she is more gracious than I have seen her yet in her manner to Mr. Lanier.

This gentleman expresses himself very much pleased with the Springs and the company.

"It would be much more sensible to spend the rest of the summer here, instead of wandering about the mountains, encountering all manner of hardships," he remarks one day, with the air of one who has fully made up his mind.

Eric utters a long, low whistle.

"If you have any intention of that kind,

mother," he says, "pray give me warning, and I'll be off to-morrow."

"To Buck Forest, I suppose," says Sylvia, glancing round.

"To Buck Forest or some other place where there is something to be done besides lounging and smoking. To a man who flirts—Charley there, for instance—a place like this may be tolerable; but to me—"

"I beg to observe," says Charley, "that not even flirting can make it tolerable. A man must do something, in self-defense—and flirting is one of the easiest things to do—but, as for finding pleasure in it, that's another matter."

"Don't try to make us believe, my good fellow, that you haven't found pleasure in Miss Hollis's society," says Mr. Lanier, with the amiable pleasantry of a victorious rival.

"It is not a matter of the least importance what you believe," answers Charley, more brusquely than he usually speaks.

"Have you all forgotten," I interpose, hastily, "that we have not seen Paint Rock yet? Let us go down there to-morrow."

"Let us go somewhere, by all means," says Sylvia. "This kind of tread-mill existence begins to oppress me with a sense of weariness. I want to ride, to cross a swollen stream, to climb some rocks—to do any thing that has the thrill of adventure in it."

"There is not much adventure in climbing the Paint Rock," says Eric, "but, if you are very anxious for a thrill, you may throw yourself off."

"Thanks for the permission—but did not somebody talk of crossing the river and going to Lovers' Retreat this evening?"

There is nothing else to be done, so we all decide to go, and Charley invites Miss Hollis to join our party. We cross the river, which is beginning to lose its turbid tinge and wear its emerald tint again—those of us who are prudent on the ferry-boat, those who are imprudent in a small craft that lies at the foot of the lawn. The latter crew consists of Charley, Miss Hollis, and Rupert. Sylvia would like to be with them, but she does not say so. I only know as much by the expression of her eyes as she watches the little boat shoot across the rapid current, while our slow old ferryman has not pulled us half across the stream.

We land on the other side at length, however, and stroll along the road for some dis-

tance; then, turning, enter a narrow, shaded ravine. A musical stream comes dashing over its rocks to meet us, up the bank of which we take our course. There is no perceptible path, and the way is very rough, but only Mr. Lanier complains of this.

"If these people had any enterprise," he says, "they would have all such places as this made accessible by good paths."

"May a kind Fate keep such an idea from ever entering their heads!" says Sylvia. "Can't you see how much more delightful this is? Who cares for a pleasure that costs no effort? We enjoy the cascade a great deal more—my dress is caught, if you please—because we have trouble in reaching it."

"Do you think so?" asks the young man, a little skeptically, as he unfastens the dress from the bush on which it is caught.

"O Mr. Kenyon, how shall I ever climb over this?" cries Miss Hollis, hesitating at the foot of a large rock which it is necessary to mount.

"There's no difficulty at all," says Ru-



"'Let me lift you,' says Charley."

pert, "if you just put your foot on that ledge and spring."

"There will be still less difficulty if you let me lift you," says Charley, and he *does* lift

her—a very substantial weight she is, too!—over the formidable obstacle. Then he stands, ready to assist Sylvia in the same manner.

"I won't trouble you," she says, waving aside his offered hand. "I don't consider this any thing at all in the way of climbing. Is that the cascade yonder?"

Yes, it is the cascade—filling all the stillness with its fairy-like murmur. Over rocks, across fallen trees, and through the dense growth of laurel that fringes all these water-courses, we make our way to the bank, and go out on the rocks below the fall. The glen is only one of thousands equally beautiful; but, as we stand, with the sheet of spray and foam before us—a cascade that might be Undine herself—dense foliage on each side, towering mountains above, and an atmosphere of green, shadowy twilight—though we left the sun shining on the outside world, pervading every thing, we are enchanted by its loveliness.

"It is like a miniature of Linville," says Eric. "Fancy these walls of rock two thousand feet high, and this stream a river, and you have an idea of Linville Gorge."

"I wish I could go there," says Sylvia. "Is it quite impossible for us to do so this summer, Eric?"

"Quite impossible—according to our present plan of travel. Don't you know that it is an important part of sight-seeing to know what must be left unseen?"

"And this is Lovers' Retreat!" says Rupert, standing on a mossy, slippery rock in the middle of the stream. "If I were a lover, it seems to me I should select a retreat that was not so damp—or so snaky."

"What do you know about the sentiments of lovers?" asks Charley. "Let me tell you that, when one is a victim of the tender passion, one does not consider snakes."

"Unless you see them," says Eric. "And Rupert is right: this looks as if it might be one of their favorite retreats."

"I wish that the people who name places of this kind would consider some other class of the world's population besides lovers," says Sylvia.

"They are the most interesting class, are they not?" asks Mr. Lanier.

"On the contrary, I think they are the most uninteresting," she answers, decidedly. "They are always selfish, absorbed in their own affairs—and silly!"

"Dear me! what a list of charges," says Miss Hollis, with an affected laugh.—"Take warning, gentlemen! Miss Norwood will have little sympathy for you if you fall in love."

"Then we can come to this retreat and find some kindly rattlesnake to put an end to our pain," says Charley.—"Here's a pretty flower. Will you have it?"

It is Miss Hollis to whom he offers the flower—a delicate wild azalia—and she accepts it most graciously.

"I am so fond of flowers," she says. "I see a scarlet lobelia growing yonder on the rocks by the cascade. I wish—oh, I *do* wish I could get that!"

"But you can't!" says Rupert, looking at the indicated flower, which grows in an inaccessible place—on the face of the rock over which the cascade tumbles, with a deep pool below.

"Here is a lobelia," says Mr. Lanier, who has been prying about among bushes and stones. "Will it not do as well?"

"Oh, no," says Miss Hollis, shaking her head. "It is *not* that lobelia.—Mr. Kenyon, can't you find any way to get it for me? I should be so delighted, and would wear it in my hair to-night."

"With such an inducement, I must certainly make an effort to get it," says Charley, gallantly—but he looks doubtfully at the position of the flower.

"Charley, don't be a fool!" says Eric, aside. "You can't possibly get it without risking a plunge-bath, and it will be no joke to fall into that pool. It must be six or eight feet deep."

"I feel as if I can never be satisfied if I don't have it," says Miss Hollis, with the prettiest air of appeal.

"Then you shall have it," says Charley, springing up the bank.

"What on earth is he going to do?" I say.

What he is going to do is soon apparent. We hear him breaking through the bushes by the side of the stream, and presently he appears on the top of the fall. Lying down there, and holding by a laurel-shrub, he leans far over the rock, and tries to gather the flower. It is a most precarious position, and one which it is not pleasant to contemplate.

"Go back!" Eric, Rupert, and I cry in chorus. "You can't reach it—you'll certainly fall over. Go back!"

"O Mr. Kenyon, pray don't!" cries Miss Hollis. She turns away, and covers her face with her hands. "I can't look!" she says, "I really can't.—Please tell me if he falls."

Sylvia looks on steadily—her color bright, her lips set.

"I hope he *will* fall!" she says. "He deserves it for such folly."

"He'll go over head-foremost in a minute," says Mr. Lanier, philosophically.

Meanwhile Charley, deaf to our warnings, leans farther and farther over the rock, reaches nearer and nearer the flower. At last his hand touches it.

"By George, he's got it!" cries Rupert, triumphantly.

The words are scarcely uttered before the laurel-bush, on which he has bent his whole weight, breaks suddenly. He tries to recov-

The tremendous splash which he makes informs Miss Hollis—even before our exclamations—what has occurred. She turns, and screams, of course—the women who make mischief are the women who always scream over it. Nobody heeds her. Eric and Rupert spring forward just as Charley's head rises like a cork. A stroke or two brings him to water where he can wade. Then the others assist him out and deposit him, dripping, on the rocks.

"I've a great mind to say 'Serves you right!'" remarks Eric. "I hope you are satisfied."

"I believe I am," replies Charley, as soon as he can speak. "But I have the flower.—You'll excuse my coming near you in my present moist condition, Miss Hollis—but here it is."

He gives it to Rupert, who presents it to the young lady.

"I can't tell you how much I shall prize it," she cries, "nor how much I am obliged to you for taking so much trouble to gratify me; but I would give *any thing* if you had not fallen into the water. I was horribly frightened, for I felt *sure* you would be drowned."

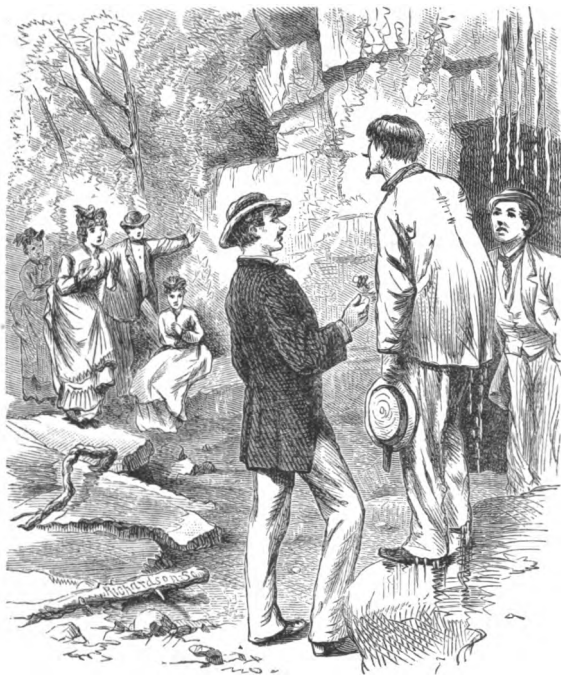
"Thanks," says Charley. "I might have been, perhaps, if I had struck my head against the rock. Luckily I had presence of mind enough to turn a somersault; so I escaped a fractured skull."

"You'll not escape a cold, if you don't go at once to the hotel and change your dress," I say, anxiously; "Miss Hollis will excuse you, since you have suffered such a misadventure in her service."

"I will go with him!" cries Miss Hollis, eagerly.

"Since he suffered in my service, I should be *very* ungrateful to send him back alone."

"You are exceedingly kind," says Charley, "but I must deprive myself of the pleas-



A Mishap.

er his balance, but the wet rock is too slippery. He catches desperately at another shrub—fails to reach it—and goes, all in an instant, down into the pool!

ure of your companionship, for once. You would not fancy the rate at which I must walk—not to speak of my excessive dampness."

He rises as he speaks—a ludicrous figure, certainly—and moves away. In reaching the bank he passes Sylvia, who has not uttered a word since he fell.

"I hope you were not very much startled," he says, pausing before her, with a laugh.

"Not at all," she answers, looking at him with a cool, bright glance. "You know my nerves are very good. I had no idea that you would be drowned."

"And would not have cared very much if I had been, I dare say," he remarks, carelessly. "Good nerves are capital things—in their way.—Well, *au revoir* to you all!—Miss Hollis, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you in the ballroom to-night."

He disappears, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog as he goes. When the last glimpse of his figure has vanished, we look at each other, and, yielding to an overmastering inclination, burst into a peal of laughter.

Miss Hollis appears in the ballroom with the lobelia in her hair that night, but Charley's devotion is by no means so excessive as it has been. Whether the plunge-bath has cooled his ardor, or whether he is alarmed by the melting glances with which the young lady favors him, it is impossible to say, but the change in his manner is very evident. I remark this when he comes down and sits by me.

"One can't keep a flirtation at high-water mark all the time," he says. "There must be ebbs in all tides. To tell you the truth, Miss Hollis is pretty, but insipid to an appalling degree."

"You must have made that discovery very recently."

"No, I have been aware of it for some time; but there are certain moods in which one is more intolerant of insipidity than in others."

"I am afraid you bear malice for your plunge in the pool; but you had your own folly to blame for that, as well as hers. By-the-by, do you think you will suffer from it?"

"Suffer!" he laughs. "Not in the least. How well Sylvia is looking to-night! I suppose it is not worth while for me to ask her to dance—she would certainly be 'engaged.'"

Does she mean to marry that fellow Lanier?"

"You had better ask her if you are curious on the subject. I have no patience with men who try to obtain such information at second hand. A faint heart never yet won a woman, and never deserved to win one!"

"Ah!" says Charley, calmly. "But suppose the woman is not to be won by any kind of a heart? If I asked Sylvia such a question, she would tell me that it was no affair of mine."

"And that is all you know about it!" I think, as he saunters away. Puck's words occur to me with great force—"Lord! what fools these mortals be!"—and never such fools as in a matter that would seem to demand, above all others, the exercise of the soundest sense.

The next day is appointed for the excursion to Paint Rock—distant seven miles from the Springs, and consequently three miles over the Tennessee border. Several additions to our party make it quite large. Aunt Markham declines to go—seeing no attraction in rocks—but Eric fills both carriages with sight-seers, and two or three equestrians swell our number. Sylvia, as usual, is on horseback and looking her best—a best which quite extinguishes Miss Hollis, who also rides, but whose steed is poor, and whose horsemanship is very defective. Eric places his handsome Cecil at her service, but she is afraid to mount him, hence Charley has the satisfaction of riding him. A better horse than Cecil on which to "show off" graceful horsemanship it would be difficult to find. He has not a single vicious trait, but his spirit would turn the hair of a timid rider gray with terror. He dances as if he had been reared in a circus; and, if he is required to stand for a minute, will rear straight up on his hind-legs and paw the air with his front-feet. He repeats this performance several times before we start—varying it by waltzing on the same hind-legs; all of which makes Charley (who is a capital rider) appear to great advantage—to such advantage, indeed, that I wickedly suspect him of inciting Cecil to some of the feats.

"O Mr. Kenyon, is *that* the horse you wanted me to ride?" cries Miss Hollis, pale with consternation. "Good Heavens! what should I have done!—He will break your neck—I am sure he will! Oh, pray don't ride him!"

Charley only laughs at this appeal.

"Soh, Cecil—steady, old boy!" he says, patting Cecil's beautiful arched neck. "He is gentle as a lamb," he adds. "You could ride him without danger. He is only spirited and anxious to be off."

"I don't think I like so much spirit," says Miss Hollis, drawing her own steed away and looking askance at Cecil's curvetting bounds.

Meanwhile, Sylvia's pretty mare has caught the contagion, and is champing her bit and pawing the ground.

"Neither of them likes to stand," says Charley, looking at her. "Suppose we give them a run to keep them from pulling our arms off?"

Sylvia—not perceiving all that lies behind this suggestion—assents. The horses only need permission to go. Side by side they start, and, keeping pace admirably, sweep down the carriage-drive along the front of the hotel, and vanish around the corner of the building.

"I suppose they will be back in a minute,"



The Funaways

says Mr. Lanier, looking after them uneasily, "but it is very wrong of Kenyon to encourage Miss Sylvia in riding so recklessly. There is always danger of an accident."

"Sylvia can take care of herself," says Eric, gathering up the reins—he is to drive the phaeton—"and Charley is not likely to lead her into danger.—Now, are all ready?"

"All ready," answers a chorus of voices from the "jersey," which is filled to-day with other freight than trunks.

"No, no," cries Miss Hollis; "Mr. Kenyon has not come back."

"We must wait for Miss Sylvia," says Mr. Lanier.

"Not at all necessary," says Eric. "We can follow them."

"But they went a different road from ours."

"No—they took the right road. The turnpike on the other side of the river is badly washed by the late rains, so we keep on this side for two or three miles, then cross at a lower ferry."

"They will wait for us, then?" says Miss Hollis.

"I presume so," answers Mr. Lanier.

These expectations are doomed to disappointment. We drive around the hotel, leave the grounds, cross Spring Creek, and follow the stage-road which leads along the river toward Wolf Creek, but the eyes which are strained eagerly ahead discover no sign of the runaways.

CHAPTER VIII.

"As she fled fast through sun and shade,
The happy winds upon her played,
Blowing the ringlets from the braid;
She looked so lovely as she swayed

The rain with dainty finger-tips,
As if had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

To be mounted on a good horse, to have a pleasant companion who is equally fortunate, and a good stretch of road before one—there is nothing in the whole list of physical enjoyments so absolutely exhilarating and delightful.

Those who are aware of this will not be surprised that Sylvia gives little thought to the disconsolate escort and forsaken party whom she has left behind, as Cecil and Bonnielle press eagerly forward at a sweeping canter. The morning is superlatively fresh and fair, the sunlight is bright without oppressive heat,

the river-breeze wafts the soft hair back from her face, the hedges and way-side fences, overhung with clematis, flit past, the horses keep pace admirably and enjoy the race as much as or more than their riders—together, it is a bit of the most genuine pleasure, which ends when it is necessary to check their impetuous course at a steep descent around one of the limestone cliffs which begin here.

"Oh, was not that heavenly?" says Sylvia, drawing a long breath. "Was there ever before such a charming creature as Bonnbelle, and Cecil is worth his weight in gold! Now"—a sigh—"ought we not to wait for the others?"

"Wait for them!" repeats Charley. "They must be at least two miles behind. You've no idea at what a rate we have come. Instead of waiting, let us see how soon we can get down to the Paint Rock. I'll wager any thing we reach there an hour and a half ahead of them."

This cool proposal surprises the young lady, and amuses her. There is a large spice of mischief in her composition, and the idea of Miss Hollis and Mr. Lanier left in the lurch, and consigned to each other's tender mercies, appeals irresistibly to her sense of the ludicrous. She looks at Charley, and bursts into a gay laugh.

"Did you mean this deliberately?" she asks. "There never was any thing more shameful. Poor Miss Hollis!—poor Mr. Lanier! How inconsolable they must be!"

"Don't flatter yourself with any such idea," says Charley, coolly. "Miss Hollis is at this moment making eyes at Lanier, and he is bearing his fate with the philosophy which distinguishes him. We are the scapegraces; so, like scapegraces, let us be jolly together."

"You are the scapegrace, sir. Do you suppose I had a thought of riding to Paint Rock with you when you proposed a short run to keep the horses from pulling our arms off?"

"Not the least in the world; but *I* had a thought of the kind. I knew that, if we were once fairly started on a gallop, you would not have resolution enough to stop until you were obliged to do so."

"How well you know the weak points of my character! After all, it is pleasant to be separated from the rest of the party, and

able to do exactly what one likes. You don't deserve to have me say such a thing, however."

"Why don't I deserve it?" asks Charley, looking very virtuous. "Haven't I schemed and plotted and made two mortal enemies in order to enjoy this ride with you?"

She lifts her eyebrows.

"You schemed and plotted to escape the necessity of holding in Cecil by the side of that animal Miss Hollis is on," she says.

"Of course that was it," answers Charley, meekly. "How very astute you are!"

"I am astute enough to understand *you*, at least," says Sylvia. "Why, you are as transparent as—as that spring yonder."

"Which, by-the-way, is worth stopping to look at," says Charley, checking his horse. "Did you ever see as large a spring before? It must be ten feet across, and is only one of a succession. Look! there are half a dozen of them, and the stream which rises here and empties into the river after a short course across the field, is almost a creek. Do you know the reason? We entered the limestone region about a mile back, and these are limestone springs."

"Are limestone springs always mammoth? I wonder why? But I don't admire the limestone cliffs half so much as those of granite."

"I should not think that an artist would: the gray rock is much the most picturesque. —Now, here is the ferry just before us where, according to the programme arranged by Commander Eric, we are to cross. But, if you would like to do something adventurous and altogether different from the others, I have another plan to propose."

Sylvia's eyes brighten immediately. Something adventurous and altogether different from the others—what does she desire more ardently?

"Propose your plan, by all means," she says, eagerly. "What is it?"

Charley, to his credit be it said, hesitates an instant. But it is only an instant. The spirit of adventure is too strong in him for his powers of resistance. Besides, he knows the mettle of Sylvia's courage, and that where he chooses to go she will follow; so he answers:

"By going a mile lower we can ford the river. Should you like that?"

"Like it!" She clasps her hands. "I

should like it of all things. But I did not know that the French Broad *could* be forded."

"There are two or three places on the river where it is practicable. This is one of them. There is usually thought to be some risk about it—therefore I am not sure that I ought to take you. Perhaps, after all, we had better cross at the ferry."

"That is nonsense!" says Sylvia. "Of course you know that I am going to ford the river. Nothing would induce me to cross in that humdrum ferry-boat. Come!—here is a good stretch for a canter."

A mere suggestion sets the horses off. They sweep forward with spirit. The road just here is remarkably good—level, and not very rocky. Hills dark with foliage rise on one side, on the other fields intervene between the turnpike and the river. The mountains on the opposite bank of the stream are dappled with cloud-shadows that move slowly across their great shoulders and wooded sides. Looking up the river there is a beautiful curve and a vista of heights softened into blueness. Overhead the sky is flecked with fleecy white clouds.

"What a thing it is to be alive—and on horseback—such a day as this!" says Sylvia, as they ride "through sun and shade" without drawing rein.

"What a thing it is to have left Lanier and Miss Hollis behind!" says Charley.

Presently they reach the ford, which is their point of destination. As they pause, Charley springs down from his horse and looks at the road, which, overarched with shade, leads into the water. Then he glances up at his companion with rather a grave expression on his face.

"I see no trace of anybody having passed here recently," he says. "Sylvia, I don't fancy the idea of taking you in."

"Very likely nobody has forded to-day or yesterday," says Sylvia, composedly. "Have you ever crossed here?"

"Several times—two or three years ago."

"Was it deep fording?"

"As well as I remember, it was rather deep fording—too deep for you, I am afraid. We must go back to the humdrum ferry."

But Sylvia stands her ground, and looks undauntedly at the broad river, with its swift, turbulent current.

"I have no desire to be drowned," she

says; "and if you think there is *real* danger, I will go back. But if you only hesitate on my account—and because you fancy, perhaps, that I shall be frightened by a little deep fording—I insist upon going forward."

"I can't imagine that there is any real danger, but still—"

"Then we will go. Forward!"

She waves her hand with an imperious air that her companion knows well. The idea of turning back is as disagreeable to him as to herself. He springs on Cecil.

"Follow me, then," he says, and rides into the river.

Sylvia does not hesitate a moment. She gathers up her habit and follows. Bonni-belle, however—remembering her late experience at Laurel—does not like the look of things. She pauses, snorts, would fain draw back, but a sharp cut of the whip urges her forward. Down she plunges into a rocky hole, and the turbid water rises up over Sylvia's boot. She confesses afterward that her courage sinks a little. If this is "deep fording" at the shore, what will it be in mid-stream? She says nothing, but lifts the mare into shallower water, and follows Charley closely as he slowly splashes ahead. A few yards from the shore they begin to feel the force of the current—a force which increases with every step, and makes the horses totter as they breast it. For the first time in her life Sylvia grows a little giddy as she looks down at the swift, eddying river. A fear of falling from her seat comes over her, and she clutches the saddle, but does not utter a word. On they go, the horses stumbling over the rocky bottom, the current growing momentarily stronger, the water rising momentarily higher. It is permanently over and above Sylvia's boot now, and sweeps the skirts which she vainly attempts to lift out of it. Brave as she is, she begins to feel dismayed, and wonders how this will end, when suddenly Charley stops. She knows at once that something is wrong by the expression of his face as he looks round.

"We must go back," he says. "I dare not take you farther. I fear I have mistaken the ford, and another foot of water will swim the horses."

"Go back!" repeats Sylvia. She looks around. They are in the middle of the stream, which sweeps tumultuously down upon their swaying horses. She never for-

gets the sight—which is one of terror as well as of majesty. The distance to either bank seems as great as the width of the entire river when regarded from one of those banks,

able every instant that she will lose bottom. Charley glances round in anxiety, and meets a brave, bright smile.

"You were right in describing this as



"Follow me, then," he says, and rides into the river."

while the view up and down is wildly beautiful. Just now she does not think of the beauty, however. She realizes fully the danger of their position, but she lifts her hand and points ahead. "We are as near that shore as the other," she says. "Let us go on."

The quietness of her tone reassures Charley. He has evidently no burst of terrified hysterics to dread.

"I hope this is the deepest water," he says, "but if it is not—if the horses lose bottom and are forced to swim—don't be frightened! If you keep your seat, Bonni-belle will carry you safely through. Cling to her neck if the worst comes. Now!"

Forward again—the horses breasting the impetuous current, which nearly sweeps them off their feet, gallantly and steadily. Still higher the water rises. In another minute they must be forced to swim, Sylvia thinks, gathering all her resolution and courage to her aid. The water is at this time nearly on a level with Bonni-belle's back, and it is prob-

able every instant that she will lose bottom. "She'll swim in another moment, I think."

"Can you keep your seat?" he asks. "Shall I come and hold you on?"

Even under these circumstances, Sylvia resents this as an imputation on her horsemanship.

"No, indeed!" she answers. "I'm quite capable of keeping my seat without being held on."

Two or three yards farther of deep wading, and then—blessed relief!—the water grows a little shallower. The horses splash on resolutely, yet cautiously, pausing on every stone, as Sylvia afterward says, to feel for the next. As they approach the shore the current grows less strong, the stream more shallow. At length they reach the bank, ride out of the water and find themselves safe on dry ground.

"Thank God!" says Charley—who is not usually devout—with a sincerity that cannot be doubted. "Laurel was child's-play to that!" he goes on, flinging himself from his

horse and coming to Sylvia's side. "What a heroine you are!" he says. "But I shall never forgive myself."

"Why not?" she asks, with that slight, nervous laugh which is so significant of a tension removed. "We have come through safely, and I have to thank you for another adventure. Charley, I am going to confess something—I *was* frightened for a little while in the middle of the stream."

"So was I—horribly!" he says. "I thought I had lost the ford, and that, weighted with boots and heavy clothing, I should have to swim with you to the bank. Lanier would have taken better care of you."

"He would have taken better care of himself—there's not a doubt of *that*," she answers, coolly. "But you and I love danger, and some day, perhaps, as the Bible says, we shall perish in it."

"I hope we may perish together, then."

"What pleasure or profit would that be to either of us? But does it not occur to you that we are rather wet?"

"Wet! I should think so." He touches her heavy, dripping skirts with his hand. "What shall we do? You must dry yourself, or our adventure may end by making you ill."

"I must dry myself—and so must you—or the others will know what we have done—and I don't want them to know."

"They are bound to know, for the ferryman will tell them that we have not crossed there."

"But they need not be told how deep the ford was, or what danger we were in. I should never, never hear the last of it from Aunt Markham if she knew."

"And she would never trust you with me again. You are right—it is best to say as little about it as possible. We will describe the ford as admirable. Now, I think I see a house yonder where we can go and dry ourselves."

They ride up to the house, which stands a little back from the road, with steep, cultivated hills rising immediately behind. A woman is seated in the door with a spinning-wheel. She stops spinning and looks at the equestrians as they pause. Charley uncovers like a cavalier.

"Good-day, madam," he says. "We have just forded the river below here and found it high—so high that this lady is very wet. Will you let her come in and dry herself?"

The eyes of the spinner open wide—her countenance expresses the extreme of stolid astonishment.

"You don't mean to say that you've forded the river!" she says. "Well, I wonder! Why, there ain't but one man



"You don't mean to say that you've forded the river!" she says."

forded there for months past—and he came near havin' his team drowned. You see the river, it's been awful high all summer, and they say the ford's dreadful washed out by the big fresh last spring."

Charley and Sylvia look at each other. They feel more than ever that it is necessary they should keep the knowledge of their adventure to themselves.

"May I come in and dry my clothes?" the young lady asks, with the courtesy which never fails to win courtesy from others. "I shall not be long."

"To be sure—come in," says the woman, moving her wheel back. "Sakes!—but you air wet—wet clean to your waist!" she exclaims, as Sylvia, having been lifted from her horse, comes in. "I'll make up a fire—here, Matildy, you and Jake bring some wood—so you kin dry yourself."

Matildy and Jake—members of a band of staring, tow-headed children—disappear immediately, but Sylvia's mind is more bent on escaping detection than on drying herself.

"Pray tell me," she says, eagerly, "have a party from the springs passed here on their way to Paint Rock—two carriages and several people on horseback?"

"No," the woman answers, shaking her head. She has seen no such party—whereupon Sylvia darts back to the door.

"They have not passed yet," she says to Charley, "but, of course, they will before long, and they will see the horses and come in and find us, if you don't take care. Put the horses out of sight—anywhere! I *won't* be found in such a plight as this!"

"You kin take the horses to the stable yonder ef you've a mind to," says the hostess, coming forward. "I'm sorry none o' the boys is about fur to help you."

"Thanks—I don't need any help," says Charley; and, obedient to orders, he marches off, leading the two horses.

Sylvia watches him with a smile. Then she retires to an inner room, and, taking off her wet garments, puts on some coarse but clean ones of her hostess, whose heart is quite won by her bright face and sweet manners. Scarcely has this been accomplished and the dripping clothes hung before the fire to dry, when a roll of approaching wheels is heard, and she rushes to the window in time to see the phaeton and wagon drive past, laden with their merry crowd. Next come

two gentlemen on horseback, and then Miss Hollis and Mr. Lanier appear—the former making an heroic effort to smile as she is bumped to and fro in her seat by a horse that *will* trot despite her frantic tugs at his rein; the latter wearing an air of the most unmistakable sulkiness.

It is sad to relate that Miss Norwood laughs over this spectacle until tears stand in her merry eyes, and she has by no means recovered her gravity when, several minutes later, Mr. Kenyon, very damp about the lower extremities, but *insouciant* as ever, appears.

"O Charley! did you see them?" she cries. "Is your conscience torn by remorse? Don't you know that at this moment Miss Hollis could drown *me*, and Mr. Lanier could drown *you*, with the greatest pleasure?"

"We came very near gratifying them both," says Charley. "Yes, I looked round a corner of the stable and saw the cavalcade. Lanier seemed uncommonly cheerful. I am afraid that, between her horse and her escort, Miss Hollis is hardly enjoying her excursion."

"You can make amends for all by riding home with her—only, if she was of my mind, she would not let you do so."

"She will not be of your mind," says Charley, with an air of resignation.

The duty of riding home with Miss Hollis is in the future, however, so he does not suffer it to weigh on his spirits.

There can be no doubt that these two scapegraces enjoy the hour which they are forced to spend in this manner. There is a freedom from restraint, a flavor of adventure in it which pleases the taste of both.

"I vote that we go somewhere and spend the day by ourselves," says Charley. "Those people down at Paint Rock are all more or less bores."

"How kind of you to say so! I shall tell Alice and Eric."

"Of course I didn't mean Alice and Eric. But some of the rest—that puppy Lanier, for instance.—See here, Sylvia, do you intend to marry him?"

He breaks off abruptly in this way—they are sitting on the piazza alone together—and looks at her with an appealing glance in the blue eyes she knows so well. A tide of crimson comes to her face.

"What do you mean by asking me such a

question, Charley?" she demands, indignantly. "Do you think it likely that I 'intend' to marry a man who has not asked me to do so?"

Charley utters a low whistle, expressive of intense incredulity.

"That is beating the devil about the bush," he says. "You know as well as I do what Lanier means, and what he hopes. As for me, I've never made any secret of what I feel for you. I don't pretend that it gives me any claim on you; I'm perfectly aware that you don't care two pins for me; but still, for the sake of our old comradeship, you might let me know whether you contemplate becoming Mrs. Lanier."

The color still remains on her face. She looks down, and beats nervously on the side of her foot with her riding-whip.

"Honestly, I don't know," she says, "but—I don't—think—I—do. It is impossible to tell, however. The world and the devil may prove too strong for me. One thing is certain—I don't encourage him. You see for yourself that I snub him constantly."

"Your clothes are dry, miss, if you want to put 'em on," says a voice behind.

The dry clothes having been assumed and the horses brought out, they set forth with renewed spirit in search of their party. The day has advanced considerably toward its zenith, but heat in this altitude is rarely oppressive. Moreover, the road is very shaded—the same turnpike along the bed of the river, overhung by hills and cliffs, with which they have become familiar—and their rapid motion creates a breeze. One fair, wild scene succeeds another, like enchantment. Here and there the winding river grows still and glassy as a mountain-lake, sweeping softly by banks that are shadowed by drooping trees and draped with graceful vines. Again it breaks into tumult once more, though not such tumult as that above the Springs, or flows in eddying ripples around the greenest of green islands. Presently the road passes beneath a magnificent cliff, the surface of which is broken into irregular escarpments like layers of stone, and Charley says:

"Here is the Paint Rock. Notice the streaks of color from which it takes its name. Is it not singular that anybody could be so ignorant as to fancy that this, which plainly is part of the composition of the rock, was laid on by human hands?"

"Does anybody really think so?"

"Yes, a great many people think that the Indians painted it—at least they say so. The mingling of colors is certainly peculiar, is it not?"

"Very peculiar and very beautiful. I wish you were a geologist, that you might tell me what gives that deep-red tint. Hark! what is that?"

It is a shout, apparently from the clouds.

"Halloa!" says a voice from above. "Here we are!"

Charley looks up and waves his hat by way of reply. Sylvia also glances up. A hundred and fifty feet above, a group of figures stand, outlined like silhouettes against the blue sky. Riding a little farther, they find the carriages and horses in the shade by the river-bank, with Harrison reclining comfortably on the seat of the wagon. Seeing the riders approach, he lifts himself and descends to the ground.

"Mass Eric and all of 'em's been wonderin' what's come of you, Mass Charley," he says, taking Cecil, as Charley springs down. "They told me to tell you they'se up on the rock."

"So I see," says Charley.—"Now, Sylvia, pin up your habit well, for we have some steep climbing to do."

"Here?" asks Sylvia, looking a little aghast at the face of the great rock which towers over them.

"No, this way," he answers, passing round the corner of the cliff, to the side where Paint Creek comes down to the French Broad, reflecting in its clear water the varied tints of the ledges of rock that rise over it.

A winding path—and a very steep one—leads from here to the summit of the cliff. When, breathless and exhausted, the two truants appear on top, they are received with a storm of greetings and inquiries:

"Where on earth have you been?"—"What have you been doing?"—"Are you not ashamed of yourselves?"—"How is it that they told us at the ferry you had not crossed the river?"—"How did you get behind us when you started in front?"

These and many like inquiries are asked all at once. Sylvia lifts her hands with an air of appeal. "Spare us, good people," she says. "Just now we have no breath to tell you anything. Will somebody lend me a fan?"

"I have been seriously uneasy about you,"

says Eric to Charley. "Not hearing of you at the ferry, I was afraid you had attempted to ford the river where we were in the habit of doing so a year or two ago, and the ferryman says the ford is dangerous now."

"We can testify that he is mistaken," says Charley, with the most admirable nonchalance. "We *did* cross at the ford, and here we are in safety."

"Crossed at the ford!" repeats a horrified chorus. "Good Heavens, what a risk!"

"Are you in earnest?" asks Eric, suspiciously. "If you crossed at the ford you ought to have been ahead of us, and here you are an hour behind."

"We spent that time eating muscadines on the bank of the river. It does not answer to hurry one's self on an excursion of this kind."

"No, it seems not," says Eric, dryly.

Meanwhile Mr. Lanier and Miss Hollis are conspicuous by their absence. Sylvia glances round, and presently sees them at the farther end of the rock. "We must go and make amends for our rudeness," she says to Charley. "They have really 'cause to be offended."

Neither of them proves implacable, and harmony is soon restored, only Mr. Lanier grows pale when he hears that Sylvia has added to her list of adventures the feat of having forded the "racing river."

"If I had been with you, I should never have suffered you to run such a risk," he says.

"So I told Charley," answers the young lady, demurely.

The view from the top of the Paint Rock, without being grand or extensive, is very beautiful, especially on one of the summer days, when white, billowy clouds lazily follow in the wake of the sun. It is exactly

such a day when we stand on the breezy height, and see the French Broad with its fairy islets, far below. Chains of hills melt softly into each other in every direction, for our elevation enables us to overlook those walls of green which, from the level of the river, bound the gorge, and blue peaks stand outlined against the sky. Over all the wide panorama shifting shadows fall with charming effect, and the variety of tints baffles analy-



The Cliffs.

sis or description. We are in the heart of that great range of mountains, known at different points as the Smoky, the Unaka, and the Roan, which divides North Carolina from her daughter Tennessee; and, wherever we turn, some scene of striking beauty arrests the attention. Half a mile farther down the river are the Chimneys—rocks in formation very like the one on which we stand, broken by some caprice of Nature into isolated, chim-

ney-like shapes; but the road to them has been washed away by the turbulent river, and never replaced. Hence they are almost inaccessible. A portion of our party go as far as practicable, and report that by standing on some tilting stones in the bed of the river, and craning their necks around a cliff-like projection, they are only able to obtain a partial and unsatisfactory view. Those who remain behind, therefore, congratulate themselves on their wisdom. Certainly to sit on the summit of the great rock under the shade of the pines that grow here and there, with the boundless, sapphire sky above and the lovely, outspread world below, is a pleasure that must be put in the list of those which are as great in memory as in reality.

CHAPTER IX.

"It seemed some mountain, rent and riven,
A channel for the stream had given,
So high the cliffs of limestone gray
Hung o'er the torrent's way."

"I THINK," says Sylvia, deliberately, "that I should like to climb that height."

She points as she speaks, and we all look round. Immediately behind the Paint Rock, on which we are gathered, stands an abrupt and rugged mountain, towering several hundred feet higher, and showing an almost precipitous side.

"I wonder what you will propose to do next?" I say. "Who do you fancy will risk his neck by climbing that mountain with you?"

"The view from there must be very fine," she remarks, "a great deal finer than this—which I don't consider at all remarkable.—Mr. Lanier"—she turns with her sweetest smile to that gentleman—"will *you* go with me?"

Mr. Lanier hesitates. Pity him, all prudent people who dislike unnecessary exertion and avoid useless risks! He is comfortably seated under a pine-tree, fanning the young lady who proposes this feat, and, being as averse to it as a man could be, he looks at the mountain in troubled silence for an instant. Then he says:

"You have no idea what you are proposing. It is quite impossible for you to ascend that hill. There is no path, and the side is terribly steep—it would be dangerous to attempt such a thing."

"Dangerous!" Her lip curls. "Every thing is dangerous, except walking on level ground—and even then one might fall in the river. I know I can climb up there—and I mean to do it!"

"Bravo, Miss Norwood!" cries an unexpected voice—the voice of a gay young widow, who has been devoting her fascinations to Eric. "If you succeed, I'll follow you."

"Had you not better come with me, Mrs. Cardigan?" says Sylvia. "Perhaps, after we have made the ascent, some of the gentlemen may feel it safe to follow."

"More likely we shall be obliged to go below and gather up your fragments," says one of the gentlemen, composedly.

"Yes, I believe I will go with you," says Mrs. Cardigan. "It is very stupid to do no more than hundreds of other people have done."

"That sentiment has been the cause of more foolish risks than could be reckoned," says Eric, "but, if you are in earnest about climbing the hill—and are not afraid of a sunstroke—I'll take you up."

"Thank you," says Mrs. Cardigan, graciously. "People never have sunstrokes in the mountains, I believe.—Well, Miss Norwood, are you ready?"

Yes, Sylvia says she is ready, and she rises without a glance at her companion. But that unhappy man rises also, with an heroic attempt to look cheerful.

"I haven't an idea that you can reach the top—and I'm sure you'll be sorry that you made the attempt," he says; "but of course I'll do my best to take you up."

"Pray don't come on my account," says Sylvia. "I need very little assistance in climbing."

This is not very gracious encouragement to overheat himself in the most unpleasant manner, besides risking his neck; but Mr. Lanier feels that he is put upon his mettle, and he will not recede.

"Lead the way, Markham," he says. "You understand this business of scrambling over rocks and swinging to bushes better than I do."

"Eric shall *not* lead the way!" cries Sylvia, springing forward. "I made the proposal, and I insist upon going first."

Poor Mr. Lanier! It is impossible not to laugh at the glance with which he regards the height before him as he follows the young

lady, who—with her riding-skirt looped to her ankles—takes her way along the neck of land which connects the rock with the mountain.

"How much energy Miss Norwood has!" says Miss Hollis, with a little shudder. "I do not think I should like to be her escort—on a mountain."

"She certainly puts Lanier through a course of exercise which he would not be likely to undertake of himself," says a sympathetic gentleman. "I'm sorry for the fellow, and I shouldn't be surprised if she broke his neck and her own too."

"There's not the least danger of her breaking her own neck," puts in Charley's quiet voice. "She climbs like a deer, and her head is as cool as—as an iceberg. But I wouldn't insure Lanier's neck," the speaker ends, calmly.

The ascent of the mountain is slow and very difficult. Sylvia was correct in saying that she requires little assistance—which is fortunate, since it is evidently quite as much as her escort can do to assist himself. She



"Once we see Sylvia mounted on a large rock, waving her handkerchief."

leads the way, grasping the bushes with one hand, and planting her alpenstock with the other. Eric and Mrs. Cardigan take a slight-

ly different route, and the two couples keep tolerably well abreast of each other. Now and then they pause to rest, and once we see Sylvia mounted on a large rock, waving her handkerchief to us in an ecstatic manner, while Mr. Lanier leans exhausted against it.

"What hot work it must be!" say the lookers-on.

"I am as devoted to Nature as anybody," remarks Miss Hollis, "but I must say that I think such an exertion as this *foolish*—don't you, Mr. Kenyon?"

"I am opposed on principle to all unnecessary exertion," answers Mr. Kenyon, "and just now I am so well satisfied to be under this tree—with you—that the finest view in the world could not tempt me away."

As the adventurous climbers mount higher and yet higher, it makes one giddy to look at them, hanging by such precarious foothold on the precipitous height. Several times we prophesy that they will be forced to return without gaining the summit, but they go on undauntedly, sending showers of loose stones down the mountain at every step. Occasionally we lose sight of them among the rocks and bushes, but again they are in full view, and we can see them, for they have joined forces, dragging each other up some particularly steep ascent. At last, a faint, prolonged shout tells us that they have reached the top, and we recognize Mrs. Cardigan in the figure that waves a handkerchief on an alpenstock exultantly.

"The question now is, how long will they stay there?" says a member of the party, who is anxious for his dinner.

They remain for what seems to us a long time, and it is not until most of the gentlemen have made themselves hoarse by shouts that are probably not heard, and certainly not answered, that they begin the descent. This is almost as difficult as the ascent, and it is still some time before they appear on the rock, with faces flushed scarlet, dresses torn, and an utter insolvency in the matter of breath. Sylvia speaks first.

"Look at my gloves!" she says, extending her hands.

We look, and appreciate fifty per cent. higher the difficulties of the ascent. The gloves are dog-skin gauntlets, and the entire palms are peeled off white.

"You should keep those in remembrance of the Paint Rock Mountain," says some one.

"She has plenty of mementos," says Mr. Lanier. "Look here!"

We look and laugh. He is very much of a dandy in the matter of dress, this hapless gentleman, and to see all his coat-pockets

ever made would contain it, and how he has managed to bring it down the mountain—not to speak of bringing Mrs. Cardigan also—we are unable to imagine.

"He seemed to have no difficulty about

it," says that lady; "but, if an emergency had arisen, I am sure he would have let me go and kept the rock."

"I should have been more excusable in such a case than you think," he answers. "I have several specimens of the Paint Rock, but none so perfect as this. Look at the streaks of color on it—why, it is admirable!"

"And unique, I suppose; while women are easy enough to find," she says, laughing.—"But I hope nobody thinks me in earnest," she goes on, turning to the others. "Mr. Markham is the most capable and careful escort, and when he needed both hands to assist me he laid his specimen tenderly down, and then went back for it."

"But what did you see to repay you for all this?" we ask.

"See!" replied Sylvia; "why, twenty times at least as much as you see here. Hundreds of mountains in *that* direc-



"Look at my gloves!"

bulging with stones, and crammed with ferns and mosses, is a sight which might move the gravest to mirth, and the most insensible to compassion.

"She wanted to fill my hat, too," he says, "but I humbly submitted that I had no way to carry it except on my head, and it would have been inconvenient to have had several pounds of stones and moss in it."

"Not to such an enthusiast as yourself, I should think," remarks one of the amused by-standers.

Eric on his part is laden with a fragment of rock so large that no pocket which was

tion"—a sweeping motion toward North Carolina—"and the whole State of Tennessee as far as the Cumberland Mountains.—Didn't we, Eric?"

"Not exactly the whole State," says Eric, "but the Cumberland Mountains certainly. We were on the top of the ridge, and the view was very fine."

Soon after this—the day having considerably passed its meridian—we scramble down the steep path at the side of the rock, and take our way to the carriages. Standing there in the cool shade of the trees that fringe the river, we look up at the great cliff,

and are struck afresh by its majesty. Its rugged escarpments stand out boldly, for no shrub grows on the broken and irregular face of the precipice.

When we are about to start, Eric says:

"By-the-by, Charley, since you found the ford so good, we might as well cross there, instead of undergoing the delay of the ferry."

A quick glance passes between Charley and Sylvia—a glance compounded equally of amusement and consternation—then the former answers, coolly:

"I wouldn't advise you to do so. The ford is—well, rather deep. We crossed there, but we decided to try the ferry-boat on our return."

"Ah!" says Eric. He makes no further remark until we are in the carriage; then he says: "I knew all the time that scamp was telling what was not true when he said the ford was safe. It is certainly dangerous, and he carried Sylvia through it."

"How rash!" says Mrs. Cardigan. "And Mr. Kenyon is the last person I should suspect of rashness."

"Charley is an impostor," says Eric. "When he throws off his indolence—which is half affectation—he is not only energetic, but daring to recklessness."

"And Sylvia is as rash as he is," I say. "They should *never* be allowed to go out together."

"Sometimes they don't ask permission—this morning, for instance, they did not," says Mrs. Cardigan, with a laugh.

We reach the Springs in time for a late dinner, and indemnify ourselves for the fatigue of the morning by an afternoon *siesta* of unusual length. It is nearly sunset when we gather on the lawn near the river-bank. All the tide of watering-place life is astir. People are sitting or walking under the shade of the large trees; across a stretch of green-sward stands the hotel with a tide of well-dressed humanity flowing up and down its long piazzas; over the river the last rays of sunlight are shining on the crests of the hills at the base of which the stream flows.

We are idly enjoying this picture, and Aunt Markham is telling the latest items of gossip afloat during the day, when Mrs. Cardigan comes up. She is very handsome, this fast young widow—a brunette of the richest type, with a degree of style that would mark even a plain woman.

"Who will walk to Lover's Leap to see the sunset?" she asks. "Surely you are not all exhausted by our Paint Rock expedition?—Miss Norwood, I find that by climbing that mountain we have enrolled ourselves on the list of heroines—did you know it?"

"Reputation must be easily made in this part of the world," says Sylvia, laughing.

The stroll to Lover's Leap is a short one, and the ascent of the cliff comparatively easy. We soon find ourselves on top, with the narrow road winding like a thread below, and the turbulent river chafing over its rocks.

"If I were one of the class of lovers who make leaps," says Charley, meditatively, "I should prefer this place for the purpose to any other that I have ever seen. It has several advantages. In the first place, the height is good; in the second place, one could spring without difficulty into the water."

"And then swim out, if one liked," says Mrs. Cardigan, laughing. "But you are right—it is the best Lover's Leap I have ever seen. And I think we have the best view of the Springs from here."

It is a very good view, indeed. We overlook the green valley, with the hotel in the foreground, and a beautiful stretch of varying landscape behind. Blue, wooded hills inclose it like the walls of an amphitheatre, and we see beyond still bluer heights, with the pomp of the sunset-sky spread above. It is a pomp which is dazzling in its glory. Fantastically-shaped clouds of crimson and rose color are shot with luminous splendor, and their edges are gilded with a radiance at which we can scarcely look.

"What royal magnificence!" says Sylvia. "Sometimes the sun dies like a sovereign."

"Rather too much magnificence!" says Eric. "At least there are too many clouds; I fear we shall have bad weather again."

"That will be a pity," I observe, "since Aunt Markham has consented to start back to Asheville to-morrow."

"What!" cries Mrs. Cardigan, with an expression of the most sincere dismay, "are you going to leave the Springs? Oh, how sorry I am! I hoped we should climb a great many more mountains together.—O Mr. Markham! how can you be so faithless? You know you promised to take me up *this* mountain"—and she points to the one behind the cliff on which we are seated.

"I am at your service," says Eric. "Shall we climb it now?"

"You know that is nonsense; how can we climb it with the sun gone and twilight about to fall? But, if you leave to-morrow, I shall consider that you have broken your plighted faith, and perhaps I shall throw myself from this rock like the ubiquitous Indian maiden who was afflicted with suicidal mania a hundred years or so ago."

"In that case we can't think of leaving you behind," says Sylvia. "Why should you not come with us? The gorge of the French Broad from this point to Asheville is a great deal better worth seeing than any thing you can find here."

"It would be a good idea," Mrs. Cardigan answers. "If I return by Wolf Creek—as I came—I shall fail to see the finest scenery on the river—shall I not?"

"You will have seen none at all," says Eric. "The grandeur of the gorge is all above here."

"Then I must see it!" she says. "I have only waited for a good opportunity to do so, and I am sure I could not find a better one than this."

So the matter seems to be settled. I suggest aside to Charley that he had better invite Miss Hollis to join our party also; but he does not receive the idea with favor.

"I think we are best as we are," he says. "I would rather vote for decreasing than increasing our number."

We linger on the summit of the cliff until the sunset-tints have melted into dusk and the clouds have lost their splendor. Even then it is hard to turn and go—not knowing when we shall look on so fair a scene again. The great hills stand around, wrapped in their everlasting silence; the river surges along its stormy way below; soft evening shadows have fallen over the valley; purple shades are gathering on all the mountain-sides; a faint yet lovely glow of color still lingers in the west; the air is delicious in its freshness.

"Why cannot one grasp such hours as this, and make them last?" says Sylvia, with a sigh.

"Here comes the Asheville stage," says Mr. Lanier, leaning over the edge of the cliff.

Mrs. Cardigan looks over also, and drops a flower on the head of an outside passenger, who glances up with a start.

"Heavens! how ugly he is!" she says. "If he were young and handsome, now, what an opening for a romance!"

"I am sure he would be young and handsome if possible," says Charley; "but I beg to observe that ugly men are by no means insensible to openings for romance. I belong to that class myself, so I know whereof I speak."

"Charley, such remarks are never in good taste," says Sylvia. "Don't try to extort compliments, but help me down this cliff."

"I thought you never required help in climbing," says Mr. Lanier, watching with some jealousy the hands which surrender themselves to Charley.

"This is not climbing—it is descending," replies the young lady, coolly, "and I don't want to fall. It is *much* easier to mount than to go down."

I do not think that Mr. Lanier is altogether convinced by this positive statement—or perhaps he remembers how often his assistance was declined during the descent of the morning. At all events, he walks by my side as we return to the hotel—a fact which does not seem to damp Sylvia's spirits, for we hear her voice chatting gayly to Charley as they stroll in front.

The next morning we prepare to leave the Springs, but, despite the conversation on Lover's Leap the evening before, most of us are surprised when Mrs. Cardigan appears in traveling-dress, and announces that she has taken a seat in the stage.

"I only regret that I shall be separated from you all," she says, "and that I can't go on the top of the coach. One can see so little inside—but one does not like to mount on the top without a gentleman."

At this we all look at Eric, who, after a moment's hesitation, does what is expected of him with tolerable grace.

"If you will allow me," he says, "I will take a seat with you on the top of the coach. You can see nothing at all inside, and you need some one who is familiar with the river to point out the noted places to you."

"Oh, how delightful that would be!" cries Mrs. Cardigan, rapturously. "But I cannot be selfish enough to consent to such a thing! You must not leave your charming carriage to mount on that jolting stage—don't tempt me, please! Good-by."

She waves her hand and turns away. Eric

shrugs his shoulders slightly and follows. There is a moment or two of laughing dispute at the door of the coach, then she suffers herself to be elevated to the deck-seat, and he follows.

"Please don't blame me, Mrs. Markham!" she cries. "He *will* go!"

"Don't drive the horses hard, John," says Eric. "Take the day leisurely. We will stop at Alexander's."

With this the coach drives off—Mrs. Cardigan's blue veil fluttering like a pennon of victory in the breeze, while Eric holds an umbrella over her. We all laugh at the sight. It is something altogether novel to see Eric playing the part of cavalier.

"What a *taking* way some women—widows, especially—have!" says Charley. "If Eric is not taken for good by the time he reaches Alexander's, it will not be the lady's fault."

The stage has been gone probably an hour when we start. Though it is not much later than nine o'clock, the heat is already sultry, and there are clouds on the mountains which betoken rain. We agree that there will probably be a storm later in the day, but we enjoy the sunshine while it lasts. At Mountain Island Sylvia insists on halting; and we go out as far as possible on the ledge of rock over which the current pours in foaming rapids. Standing here, we look up at the island, which rises fifty or sixty feet above us—a bold hill in the midst of the raging stream.

"I should like to go there," says Sylvia, wistfully. But, with the best intentions, neither of her attendants can devise any means of transporting her over the whirling fall which intervenes between our standpoint and the island.

"If one had a boat, one could cross at the lower end and mount to the headland," says Mr. Lanier.

This suggestion is not of much value, however, since we have no boat, so we are forced to content ourselves with gazing. The sides of the hill are covered with a growth of ferns, which literally carpet it, but the trees have been burned, and now stand black and bare, disfiguring the beautiful picture.

"What odious barbarian was guilty of that outrage?" asks Sylvia, in a tone of indignant scorn.

"Some hunting barbarian, I believe," an-

swers Charley. "I have been told that the trees were burned because the deer, when hard pressed by the dogs, would swim the river and take refuge there."

"Oh, the wretches!" says Sylvia—which complimentary epithet is evidently not meant to apply either to the deer or the dogs.

Presently John appears on the bank, charged with a message: "Mistis say you better come on, Mass Charley—she wants to git over Laurel 'fore the rain comes up."

"A fig for the rain!" says Charley—but we turn reluctantly from the stormy rapids, the towering island, the whole wild, lovely scene, and continue our journey. The rain does not come up before we reach Laurel, and that river is found to be in a very satisfactory state. Aunt Markham stops at Wash's cabin and makes solicitous inquiries.

"Do you think it would be *safer* if I crossed in the canoe?" she asks.

Wash grins a little.

"I'm willin' to take you over ef you like, ma'am," he answers, "but the river's down low enough for fordin' now."

"Go on, then, John," she says, tremulously.

At all times Laurel is deep fording; and the current is very swift and strong, but we accomplish the passage safely—John being the best of drivers, and the horses true as steel.

"Good-by to Laurel!" says Sylvia, as she rides out of the clear water on the farther side. "I shall never, never forget it."

"I sha'n't nuther," says John, "fur it's the only place I ever heard of takin' a carriage to pieces and carryin' it over on a canoe."

We have not left this famous stream—and Laurel has fame of more kinds than one—half a mile behind, when the expected rain comes—a white, hard shower, which all in a second, as it were, sweeps over the mountains and pours upon us.

"Of course it begins again as soon as we start," says Aunt Markham, who plainly thinks that there is strong evidence of *malice prepense* on the part of the clouds.

We draw on our water-proofs, raise the carriage-top, and resign ourselves to our fate. The masculine portion of the party put on their overcoats and pull down their hats.

"Greatest country for rain ever I see!"

says John, as we plod along the narrow road, hemmed by towering cliffs and turbulent river, with the rain pouring in a white sheet far as our vision extends.

Before long the violence of the storm abates, the clouds pass as quickly as they came, the sun breaks forth—Nature is drenched, but how beautiful! Rocks, trees, ferns, and mosses—all are dripping with moisture which the sunlight turns to diamonds. We throw off our wraps and put back the top, careless that the drooping boughs under which we pass rain down absolute showers upon us as the breeze stirs them. We wind around a rocky curve, and a magnificent river-view is before us—the stream plunging and whirling against the boulders that bar its way, and tossing in white-capped waves over the ledges, the great overshadowing hills wearing a faint-blue tint as the vista recedes, and mists like white smoke rising from the gorges. The rain has swollen all the short mountain-streams, which come leaping down the hill-sides in white cascades. One narrow creek, into



A Wet Ford.

which we plunge without due consideration, is so high that the water runs into the carriage, wetting our feet and invading our

lunch-basket. Aunt Markham's face as she sits with her feet elevated on the front seat, while the horses struggle through the turbid torrent—which three or four feet lower pours over a ledge of rock into the river—is a study of mingled expressions. "O John, how frightful!" she says, when we have gained the steep bank and are safe.

"Yes'm—it was a considerable resk," says John. "If these horses wasn't the gamest I ever drove, we'd a-gone into the river certain. I was of the 'pinion for about a minute that we *was* goin'."

"There's no good in frightening one's self over past danger," I say. "We didn't go—that's enough.—Jump out, and are safe. The carriage is full of water, and my feet are as wet as if I had waded."

Varied by such adventures as these—for two or three more clouds discharge themselves upon us—we travel up the gorge, pausing now and then when the weather chances to be propitious. There are rocks—like those at the Devil's Slip Gap—to be climbed; flowers, ferns, and mountain-geraniums, to be gathered; muscadines to be eaten; finally, luncheon to be taken in a green river-nook, with the half-observed sunshine lying on the breast of the current as it sweeps by.

"How glad I am that we have left the Springs behind!" says Sylvia. "How delightful it is to be traveling again! Would it not be pleasant to prolong this gypsy life indefinitely?"

"Very pleasant," says Charley. "There might be worse things than to 'ride, ride, forever ride,' as the crazy lover in Browning's poem wanted to do. There might also be worse things than resting on the rocks in the shade, with sandwiches to eat and claret to drink."

"And the French Broud before one's eyes!"

The pleasant hour ends, as all pleasant hours do, however. We start again, and, traveling leisurely, reach Alexander's at sunset. This place looks pastoral in its loveliness as we approach—the embowered house lying in the arms of encircling hills, the glassy river in front painted with sunset hues, two figures on the bridge, and a riding-party winding along the road.

We discover, when we approach, that the figures on the bridge are those of Mrs. Cardi-

gan and Eric. They cross the road as we draw up before the gate.

"You are late," says the latter. "What has delayed you?"

"Oh—every thing!" replies Aunt Markham. "Storms, floods, torrents running into the carriage and nearly sweeping it away—Eric, you need *never* ask me to come to this country again, until there is a railroad."

"You may be sure that I never will," says Eric, laughing.

We spend three or four days at Alexander's—delightful days in which we walk and ride, climb the hills, and go out boating on the river. Gray rocks, rushing water, green boughs drooping—these things, in varied combinations, frame the idle, golden hours. The sound of the stream becomes like the voice of a familiar friend in our ears—we are almost sorry when the day arrives for us to gather together what Eric calls our traps," and set forth on our travels again.

CHAPTER X.

"What now to me the jars of life,
Its petty cares, its harder throes?
The hills are free from toil and strife,
And clasp me in their deep repose."

"Now," says Eric, "who is ready for the ascent of the Black Mountain?"

This question is addressed to the assembled party the day after our return to Asheville. The drive from Alexander's was very pleasant, and the next day is brilliantly clear—so clear that Eric says:

"If we were only on the Black, what a view we should have!"

"How far is it to the Black?" asks Aunt Markham, with a sigh. "Can we go and return in a day?"

"My dear mother, what are you thinking of?" says Eric. "It is a day's journey from here to the foot of the mountain. Then it takes the best part of the next day to ascend it; and when you are once on top you are very willing to spend the night there."

"Spend the night!—where?"

"In a cave."

"Eric!"

"I am not joking, I assure you—Charley will tell you that I am not. It is a very good shelter, and balsam-boughs make a capital bed."

"A cave!—balsam-boughs!" Aunt Markham looks so sincerely and utterly overwhelmed that the most of us cannot restrain a laugh. "It can't be possible, Eric," she says, majestically, "that you expect *me* to go on such an expedition as that?"

"Honestly, I don't think you would be likely to enjoy it," replies Eric, candidly. "You had better stay here, perhaps, while the rest of us go."

This proposal is not received so easily as it is made. Aunt Markham looks still more majestic. "You forget that there ought to be a chaperon in such a party," she says.

"I'm chaperon enough," answers Eric, coolly. "Haven't I been taking care of Alice and Sylvia all their lives, and can't I take care of them on the Black Mountain? But, if it will set your mind at rest on the propriety question, Mrs. Cardigan talks of accompanying us."

"I disapprove of Mrs. Cardigan," is on the tip of Aunt Markham's tongue, but she does not utter the words. The propriety question must, she thinks, be considered, and even the shadow of a chaperon is sometimes better than none.

"I suppose you invited her to join our party?" says Charley to Eric.

"On the contrary, she invited herself," he answers, quietly. "It was fortunate, perhaps, since I suppose she will do for a chaperon—eh, mother?"

"I think she stands very much in need of one herself," says Aunt Markham, severely.

Notwithstanding this unfavorable opinion, the matter is settled as Eric suggested. The idea of ascending a mountain on horseback, and spending the night in a cave, is more than Aunt Markham's philosophy is able to endure.

"Twenty-five years ago I might have done such a thing," she says, "but now—"

"I'd like of all things to see mother mounted on a horse," remarks Rupert, with a burst of laughter.

"You are an undutiful boy to wish to make game of your own mother—and you will never be gratified," says Aunt Markham.

Later in the day Mrs. Cardigan joins us, and we discuss the details of the expedition.

"The first essentials," says Eric, "are to provide ourselves with plenty to eat and plenty to wear. Unless we are careful on those points, we shall suffer with hunger and cold."

"Not a doubt of that!" says Charley. "The Black Mountain is the most famous place I know for becoming ravenously hungry and uncomfortably cold."

"But there is no reason why it should be so," says Mr. Lanier. "Surely it is possible for a party to take with them all that they are likely to need in the way of food and clothing."

"Not so possible as you might think. The air up there gives people appetites such as they never had before in their lives; and the nights are often so cold that no amount of clothing will keep you warm."

"But you make fires, do you not?" asks Mrs. Cardigan.

"We try to do so; but the balsam is the only wood to be had, and it is the hardest wood in the world out of which to make a fire. If you relax your attention to it for five minutes, it quietly subsides into a charred mass of black logs."

"What a prospect!" says Mrs. Cardigan, laughingly. "We are to be starved and to be frozen; and what is to repay us for all this?"

"The view," says Sylvia, "and the proud consciousness of standing on the highest point of land east of the Rocky Mountains."

"But it is extremely likely that you will not have the view," says Charley. "The rule on the Black is *not* to have it. People who live near the mountain will tell you that you might count on your fingers the days in the year when its summit is not wrapped in clouds."

"I think Mr. Kenyon must be endeavoring to dissuade us from making the ascent," says Mrs. Cardigan.

"It is certainly very kind of him to raise our spirits with such pleasant accounts of all that we are likely to encounter," says Sylvia. "But, in spite of hunger, cold, and clouds, we mean to go."

"I never doubted that for a moment," says Charley.

"With such an able commanding officer as Mr. Markham, I am sure there is no reason to apprehend any misadventures," says Mrs. Cardigan, turning her bright, brunette face toward Eric.

"An officer should not be complimented before his ability has been tested," he answers. "If it is settled that we start tomorrow, I must go and make arrangements for a supply of provisions."

He goes—rather glad, I think, to escape from the fair widow's bewitching glances. This lady is never at a loss for a subject, however. All men, from seventeen to seventy, she esteems her lawful prey, and, failing one, she falls back, with easy grace, upon another. She steps now out of the room in which we are sitting upon a balcony, and calls Mr. Lanier to admire the view of the mountains that lie in blue waves along the southern horizon.

"I am so glad that you advised me to come to this place," we hear her say. "Down at the Springs one was so shut in by hills, that it was almost equivalent to being in an oven; but here we have these lovely distant views, and such a stimulating atmosphere. If I was so fortunate as to be like yourself, one of a pleasant party, how I should delight in scampering all over the country! But it is so depressing to be alone."

"I am sure there is no reason save your own choice, why you should ever be alone," says Mr. Lanier, gallantly.

"Mark my words, Sylvia," I say, aside, "Mrs. Cardigan has invited herself to accompany us to the Black—she will invite herself to accompany us still farther if we do not take care."

"Well, why not?" asks Sylvia, carelessly. "She is rather entertaining. Are you afraid for Eric's peace of mind?"

"Are *you* not afraid for Ralph Lanier's allegiance?"

She laughs.

"Not I. More attractive women than Mrs. Cardigan have tried to shake that—and failed."

I make no remark on this confident statement, but I think that there is a limit to the perseverance of most men, and that a man so persistently snubbed as Ralph Lanier might be excused for finding a balm for his feelings in the attentions of so charming a woman as Mrs. Cardigan.

The next morning we start on our expedition. The day is bright with the golden brightness of September, and has that serene charm of atmosphere which makes the autumn a season of delight. Obedient to orders, we load ourselves with wraps of all kinds, but we cannot imagine that we shall find need for half of them. Neither can we imagine that under any possible circumstances our appetites will grow large enough

to consume the amount of provisions with which Eric fills the wagon.

"I think Mr. Markham must be preparing for a more extensive trip than we know of," says Mrs. Cardigan, with a laugh.

"Eric, do you mean to drive the phaeton?" I ask.

"Oh, pray do, Mr. Markham!" cries Mrs. Cardigan, eagerly. "I am so fond of sitting on the front seat, where I can watch the horses—and so fond of driving, too, when there is a gentleman by to take the reins if any thing should happen."

"That won't do!" says Eric, and he smiles as he looks at the speaker, who stands on the steps in her becoming costume and coquettish hat. "If you take the reins, you must be prepared to take the consequences also."

"I'll take any thing whatever, if you will only let me drive those beautiful horses," she says, gayly.

Sylvia rides, as usual; but Mr. Lanier's horse is unluckily lame, so he is obliged to leave it behind, and accept a seat in the phaeton. This necessity depresses his spirits, but Charley's are correspondingly high, and he canters off by Sylvia's side with an air not calculated to remove his rival's depression.

With many last injunctions from Aunt Markham not to break our necks, and to be sure and come back on the third day, we finally drive off. Our way out of Asheville lies toward the Swannanoa, and when we reach that stream we follow the stage-road immediately along its bank. The valley spreads fair and green around us, morning lights and shades are on the hills, a tender yet radiant haze drapes the far blue mountains, the river flows swiftly by, full of glancing brightness.

"This is the road which leads to Swannanoa Gap," says Ralph Lanier. "Do we follow it far?"

"For about twelve miles," Eric answers. "As far as Alexander's."

"I thought we left Alexander's on the French Broad," says Mrs. Cardigan, who is driving, and does it—as she does every thing—with grace and skill.

"This is another Alexander's—and a very different one," says Eric.

The road which for twelve miles leads directly up the valley of the Swannanoa, is

uniformly good. We ford the river several times, and see it in all phases of its capricious loveliness, and with every possible background—now level farm-lands and purple hills, then a beautiful pass dark with overhanging shade, again a picturesque mill with the water flashing over its dam in a sheet of silver, or mountains rising behind mountains with patches of shadow on their deep gorges and wooded sides. Through all these varying scenes the river takes its way with sweet impetuosity, swirling in rapids, flowing still and deep between its banks, or rippling gayly over stony shallows.

"Swannanoa! well they named thee
In the mellow Indian tongue,
"Beautiful" thou art most truly,
And right worthy to be sung,"

says Mr. Lanier, who has found this verse on the back of a photograph.

"It is tame here, compared to what it is as it comes down the Black Mountain," says Eric. "Some glens on the stream there I have never seen surpassed for wildness and beauty."

"Shall we see them?" asks Mrs. Cardigan.

"If you like, and if you are not afraid of rattlesnakes, which abound in such places. Our course lies directly to the head-waters of the river."

"Great place for trout-fishing, isn't it?" asks Mr. Lanier.

"Splendid place," responds Eric. "You would suspect me of exaggeration if I were to say how many speckled trout I have caught there in a day."

"Oh, how delightful!" cries Mrs. Cardigan. "May I catch some, too, please? I am devoted to fishing."

Both gentlemen laugh at this.

"Are you prepared to go into the stream and wade?" they ask. "That is the way to fish for mountain-trout. The growth along the banks is so dense that no other mode answers."

"If you had given me warning, I should have brought a wading-costume along," she says; "but at present I am not provided for any thing of that kind."

On we go, bowling lightly and easily over the road along which the heavy stage jolts and bumps.

"This is the perfection of traveling!" cries Mrs. Cardigan.

The spirited horses, which are the pride and delight of Eric's heart, do not need a touch of the whip as they move forward in that long, swinging trot which seems pleasure instead of labor to thoroughbreds. All around us lies the brightness of the mellow day, and the varied glory of the mountain-landscape. Great hills stand bathed in sunshine or dappled with shade, while at their feet are coves in which the broad, low farm-houses stand, with sunny meadows and fields of waving corn.

At noon we reach Alexander's, where we stop for dinner, and rest two or three hours during the heat of the day.

"There is no need of haste in getting to Patton's," says Eric, with a shrug. "You will have quite enough of it, for we can't ascend the mountain until to-morrow."

This seems to us a provoking delay, but we are too well drilled to think of murmuring.

"Eric knows," says Sylvia to Mrs. Cardigan, who is bold enough to express some disapproval. "He has spent every summer since he was a boy in this country, and he is so enamored of it that I think he will end by living here altogether."

When we set forth again, the afternoon has little heat in its soft glory. After leaving Alexander's, we turn abruptly from the stage-road straight toward the dark mountains that stand like giants before us. As we advance, these great heights, which make others seem like pigmy hills, inclose us on all sides, wearing every tint of dark purple and blue. Their majestic loneliness, their wild grandeur, strike one with a sense of absolute awe. We look at them, in the everlasting fixity of their repose, and realize—as perhaps it has never chanced to us to realize before—the brevity and insignificance of our existence.

"I don't wonder that mountaineers, as a rule, are melancholy," says Sylvia, who is riding behind the phaeton. "If I lived always in the shadow of these mountains, I should feel their solemnity in every act of my life; I should never be able to throw it off."

"You think so because you never have lived in their shadow," says Eric. "If you did, you would soon discover that their solemnity, which strikes you so much now, would affect you very little."

"They emblem that eternal rest
We cannot compass in our speech,"

she says, in a low voice, looking at the splendid masses as they tower against the sky, wrapped in eternal silence and motionless calm.

As we penetrate deeper into the mountains, our road leads up a narrow valley, along which a stream—clearer than crystal, if such a thing can be—takes its course, and crosses our road again and again.

"Is this the Swannanoa?" some one asks.

"It is Swannanoa Creek," Eric answers; "the branch of the stream which comes down from the Black."

The sun has dropped behind the hills that hem us in, and a few broken masses of gorgeous clouds are floating above the dark-blue peaks of Craggy, when we reach the house where we are to spend the night—Patton's, at the foot of the mountain. It is a rough place, poorly kept—hotels for tourists have not yet risen in these fastnesses—but the people, here as elsewhere, are civil, obliging, and ready to give us their best. Mrs. Cardigan grimaces a little over the room into which we are ushered; but it has at least the merit of cleanliness, which Sylvia points out.

"Will you want supper?" asks a gaunt woman, coming to the door while we are shaking off the dust of travel.

We reply emphatically that we will want supper, and probably manifest a little surprise at the question, for she goes on to explain it.

"I see you have your own purvisions," she says, "and I thought you might mean to make your supper off 'en 'em. Some folks does."

"That is the reason why some folks nearly starve on the top of the mountain," says Sylvia, with the air of one who knows all about such matters. "We don't mean to touch those provisions until we are on the highest peak of the Black."

"Here is something that we can touch, however," says Mrs. Cardigan, opening a basket of grapes, "and now let us go out for a walk."

The entire sky is flushed with a radiance which shows that the hidden sunset must be of unusual glory, when we leave the house, and, crossing the neglected yard, take our way to the stream that sings over its rocks not more than twenty yards distant. We enter a forest-road arched with shade, but, although we are not more than two steps from

the creek, we can only obtain glimpses of its flashing beauty, so dense is the growth along its banks. At length we hear such a tumult of falling water, that we feel sure something specially worth seeing is hidden from our sight, and, nerved to desperation, plunge recklessly into the thicket. Only Mrs. Cardigan holds back and suggests snakes—but Sylvia laughs.

"You are quite as likely to meet a snake where you are as here," she says. "You can't possibly guard against them, so the



"Mrs. Cardigan suggests snakes."

best thing to do is to go where you like without thinking of them."

Encouraged by this philosophical view of things, Mrs. Cardigan follows, and we find ourselves in one of those glens of which Eric has spoken. Large boulders strew the channel of the stream, over and around which, in foaming rapids and cascades, the limpid water frets and whirls. A wilderness of ivy and rhododendron, interspersed with tapering pines and stately firs, makes a wall of green along the banks, and, as we spring from rock to rock until we find ourselves in the middle of the current, we agree that, for

wild and romantic loveliness, we have scarcely seen this surpassed.

"Is it not strange," says Sylvia, "that the higher one goes in these mountains, the more luxuriant the forest-growth becomes? Look at that hill-side! It is like a tropical jungle."

"Oh, to be here when the rhododendron is in bloom!" cries Mrs. Cardigan, clasping her hands; and indeed everywhere that one turns, the broad, polished leaves of this "victor-wreath" of the mountains meets the glance.

We sit on the rocks, enthroned like mermaids, with the brawling stream around us, the rich, green hill-side towering in front, the absolute solitude of virgin Nature in every sight and sound. We do not observe that the sunset radiance fades from the patch of sky immediately over our heads, and the soft gray tints of twilight begin to steal over the scene, until steps and voices on the hidden road rouse us to a realization that our companions are in search of us.

"Hush! not a word!" whispers Mrs. Cardigan. "Let us see if they can find us."

"Here!" says Eric's voice. "Don't you see that they have broken through here? We'll find them out in the stream there."

"I see some figures—dryads and naiads, perhaps—on the rocks," says Charley, forcing his way through the dense *chaparral* of ivy and laurel.

The dryads and naiads answer with a laugh.

"Here is an excellent place if you would like another plunge-bath, Charley," I say, pointing to a crystal pool just below the rock on which I am seated.

"I wonder you ladies were not afraid of snakes," remarks Mr. Lanier, glancing round apprehensively as he makes his appearance through the bushes and over the trailing vines.

When we stroll slowly back, the cool, clear dusk has fallen. On our right the mighty peaks of the Black stand dark against the sky; immediately in front are the fantastic outlines of Craggy; overhead the moon is shining from a deep-blue sky, and the air has a freshness that is suggestive of frost.

"What a different atmosphere from that of Asheville!" says Sylvia; "and if it is so cool here to-night, what will it be on the mountain to-morrow night?"



" 'Let us see if they can find us.' "

"Cold enough to need all your wraps—and more besides," answers Eric.

We find a fire very pleasant when we return to the house. We gather round it after supper, and, with no other light than the ruddy, flickering blaze, talk until late bedtime. Eric and Charley try each to "top" the other's stories of adventures, and, if they do not succeed in this, they at least interest and amuse their audience, while Rupert sits by drinking in every detail with absorbed attention.

"What a feast is in store for you!" says Eric, suddenly laying his hand on the boy's shoulder. "I luckily encountered an old acquaintance of mine this afternoon, who will be our guide to-morrow. His name is Dan Burnet, and he is one of the most famous hunters of this region. He will tell you bear-stories by the dozen."

"He shall tell them around the camp-fire to-morrow night," says Mrs. Cardigan. "How delightful and picturesque!"

"Since I have had no adventures with

which the present party are not familiar, I shall make a diversion in the order of entertainment, and tell a ghost-story," says Sylvia.—"Attention, Rupert! I know you are almost as fond of ghosts as of bears."

We can all follow this lead, so half a dozen indifferent ghost-stories are told, and provoke more laughter than terror. Then we say good-night, and separate. We find the atmosphere of our large, unwarmed chamber very chilly, but Sylvia stoutly declines to stop up a broken window-pane.

"We had better accustom ourselves to the climate," she says. "To-morrow night we shall be much colder, without any window-panes at all."

The house has been given up to our occupation—the family retiring to a smaller one across the yard—and the lights are scarcely out and things grown quiet, before a strange noise (apparently caused by the shuffling of many feet) is heard on the piazza upon which our door opens.

"What is that?" asks Mrs. Cardigan.

"Ghosts, perhaps—or bandits," answers Sylvia.

"Bears," I suggest. "This is a bear-country."

"But I never heard that bears invaded houses—in platoons, too," says Mrs. Cardigan. "Listen! the noise is immediately by our door. Upon my word, I don't like this! If the door was locked it would be a different matter; but to have nothing but a chair between us and—and we don't know what!"

"It is certainly dreadful," says Sylvia, with a laugh in her voice. "It is queer. Somebody, or several somebodies, seem to be pulling something down. I tell you what—a light spring to the floor—"I can see through the window what is going on. It is moonlight, you know."

Her bare feet trip noiselessly across the room, she pulls the curtain back from the window, looks cautiously out, and then bursts into a laugh.

"Hounds," she says. "There are several of them, and they are doing their best to get into our provisions."

"Hounds!" repeats Mrs. Cardigan, and she, too, springs to the floor. "Drive them away, for mercy's sake! If they devour our provisions, we shall have to go back to Asheville."

The window is raised forthwith, and two

voices in energetic chorus bid the hounds depart—which they do immediately. Then, having routed the enemy, they are about to return to bed, when I suggest that it will be inconvenient to repeat this performance all night.

"You have repelled one attack," I say; "but those dogs will make another in ten minutes. Don't you think it might be well to bring the provisions in?"

"Impossible," says Mrs. Cardigan; "it would be an hour's work. Mr. Markham has provisions for a regiment there."

"We had better bring them in," says Sylvia. "As Alice says, it will never answer to leave them there, unless we appoint a watchman."

"It was shamefully careless of the boys to leave them," I say—from the force of old habit we still speak of Eric and Charley as "the boys." "They ought to be waked, to take them in."

"But who is to wake them?" asks Mrs. Cardigan.

"They sleep like the seven sleepers," says Sylvia. "We might thump on their door for an hour without rousing them. Come, let us do it ourselves."

So we do it ourselves. Perhaps the bounds, if they have any sense of humor, and are not too hungry, enjoy the scene from a distance—three spectral, white-robed figures engaged in conveying into safe quarters various baskets and packages of edibles.

"There," says Sylvia, when we bring the last within the door, which is fastened again with a chair; "now we will let those careful gentlemen wonder where their provisions are to-morrow morning."

This kindly intention is carried into effect. We are awakened early by a thump at our door, and Rupert's voice shouts, "Time to be up!" Then this young gentleman proceeds to the end of the piazza where a tin basin is placed for the use of the public. Hardly a minute elapses before we hear an exclamation. "Thunder!" he says. "Brother Eric, O Brother Eric, where are the provisions?"

"Where are what?" asks Eric, coming out on the piazza. "Did you ask about the provisions? Why, where are they? Did anybody take them into the house last night?—Charley, did you?"

"Not I," answers Charley's voice. "Have they disappeared? No doubt somebody put them away—Harrison, most likely."



"Three spectral, white-robed figures."

"No, sir, I didn't," says Harrison, appearing on the scene; "but there's hounds here, and they may have carried 'em off."

"By Jove!" says another voice—the dismayed voice of Mr. Lanier. "But hounds would have devoured the food where they found it."

"It's all gone, anyway," says Rupert. "Harrison, look about. The baskets must be *somewhere*. I know they were left here, for I saw them just before I went to bed."

"And might have thought of bringing them in," says Eric.

"We ought to tell them—really we ought!" says Sylvia, with a laugh.

"Don't do any thing of the kind," says Mrs. Cardigan. "Let them look and wonder."

We hear a great deal of searching, and such exclamations as, "Very mysterious, by George!" "What the deuce could have gone with the things?" and preserve, I regret to state, a profound silence, until there comes another thump on our door.

"I say"—it is Rupert's voice again—"do you happen to have the provisions in there?"

"The provisions!" answers Sylvia, in a tone of innocent surprise. "Pray, what should we be doing with the provisions?"

"Well, they have disappeared—" Rupert begins, when I interpose with the truth.

"They are here, Rupert," I say. "We brought them in last night to keep them from the dogs. But you deserve to have had them eaten, for your carelessness."

"They've got 'em!" we hear Rupert report a minute later, "and we owe them a good turn for not saying a word all this time."

There is so much preparation necessary for our departure that it is some time after breakfast before we start. About eight o'clock the guide arrives—a stalwart, broad-shouldered man of thirty-six or eight, with a frank, sunburned face, and a suggestion of the soldier as well as the hunter in his appearance.

"What a study for a picture!" says Sylvia. "What a thorough type of the moun-



The Guide.

taineer! If he only wore a Tyrolean hat, now—"

"Like a brigand in an opera!" says

Charley. "What ideas women have, to be sure! Why, if you looked at it from the right point of view, that old felt 'is as much more picturesque as it is more comfortable."

"I suppose you flatter yourself that *yours* is picturesque," she says.

"Not quite so much so as Lanier's English hat, perhaps, but sufficiently so for my taste.—Hallo, Burnet!—which is the pack-horse?"

"This one," answers Mr. Burnet. He has brought with him three horses and a mule. One is led up to the piazza and loaded with a number of shawls, several quilts—which Eric insists upon borrowing from Mrs. Patton—and the provisions, which have been packed pell-mell into an enormous bag. Side-saddles are placed on the others, and loud are Sylvia's remonstrances when she finds she is not to be allowed to ride Bonni-belle.

"I can't permit you to put your neck in jeopardy by riding a horse not accustomed to climbing," says Eric, authoritatively. "These animals have been reared on the mountains, and are as sure-footed as goats."

"They are quite as ugly," remarks the young lady, ungratefully. Then she glances from their tall, raw-boned proportions to the small, round mule which stands by, composedly switching its tail. "If I can't ride Bonni-belle, I will ride *that*," she says.

"A very good choice," observes Mr. Lanier. "Mules are not handsome, but they are better on mountains—because more sure-footed—than horses."

"They are only slightly inclined to prefer their own way," says Charley, "and two of a trade never agree."

Sylvia does not condescend to notice this remark. She mounts the mule—disregarding the laughter which we cannot restrain—and announces that she is ready. Mrs. Cardigan and myself are elevated on the tall mountain-steeds; the gentlemen mount the lowland horses, on which they do not hesitate to risk *their* necks; the guide, with his axe on his shoulder, leads the pack-horse in front—and so we start.

CHAPTER XI.

"Ferry pastures, beetling rock,
Slopes half-islanded by streams,
Glisten in the amber gleams
Of the sunshine—gleams that mock
Shadowed field and cool gray rock.

"Farther up the sobbing pines
Hold their uncontested sway,
Shutting out the smiling day
With their solemn, serried lines,
—Mournful, melancholy pines!"

THE sun is shining brightly, and his golden lances light up the depths of the forest into which we enter—an enchanted world of far-reaching greenness, the stillness of which is only broken by the voice of the streams which come down the gorges of the mountain in leaping cascades. Few things are more picturesque than the appearance of a cavalcade like ours following in single file the winding path (not road) that leads into the marvelous, mysterious wilderness. When the ascent fairly begins, the path is often like the letter S, and one commands a view of the entire line—of horsemen in slouched hats and gray coats, of ladies in a variety of attire, with water-proof cloaks serving as riding-skirts, and hats garlanded with forest wreaths and grasses. The guide tramps steadily ahead, leading the pack-horse, and we catch a glimpse of his face now and then as he turns to answer some of the numerous questions addressed to him.

"O Mr. Burnet," cries Sylvia, "shall we see a bear?"

"Tain't very likely," answers Mr. Burnet, glancing round with a smile, "but you'll see the tracks of one or two, p'raps. That'll be better than nothin', won't it?"

"Very much better than nothing; but I want desperately to see a bear itself."

"I kin show you a bear-trap after a while, without takin' you very fur from the road," says the hunter.

"Do you catch bears in traps?" asks Sylvia. "Tell me all about it."

It is to be supposed that Mr. Burnet complies with this request—at least we hear his voice mingling with Sylvia's blithe tones as the *cortège* winds deeper and deeper into the still, beautiful forest. Sylvia's mule, as soon as we start, declines on any account to remain in the rear of the party—or indeed anywhere but in the front rank, next the pack-horse. On such an expedition as this

people laugh at things that seem very trivial in repetition, and we make the echoes ring with our mirth as this small but determined animal pushes resolutely by every one else, and carries its protesting rider to the van.

"I have heard of the obstinacy of mules," she says, tugging fruitlessly at the rein, "but I *never* realized before what it is! I

"I wish I had a sketch of you, Sylvia!" says Rupert, between his fits of laughter. "By George! you are a comical sight—you and your mule."

"You are very ill-bred," says Sylvia, "and I am going to devote myself to Mr. Burnet."

The ascent is very gradual and very slow



"'I have heard of the obstinacy of mules.'"

can make no impression whatever on this creature. He goes exactly where he likes, without the slightest regard to my wishes. Sure-footed? Yes—he picks the best footing, with profound indifference as to whether I am scraped against trees, or pulled off by branches, or any thing else. Has a mule's mouth got no feeling? I'm sure I have pulled on this bit till my arm aches."

We are mounting all the time, but the zig-zag path spares us any thing very much on the perpendicular order. Now and then we feel inclined to cling to the manes of our horses as we feel the saddles slipping backward at some steep ascent—but on the whole the terrible accounts that we have heard of the way are by no means verified.

"We wind up the side of the mountain

like this for several miles," says Eric, "then we travel along a ridge for some distance, and finally we ascend the peak formerly called the Black Dome, now Mount Mitchell. The whole distance is about twelve miles, and the most of it is steady climbing. We shall not reach the Dome until three o'clock at earliest."

"And shall we have nothing to eat until then?" asks Rupert, dismayed.

"Nothing," is the disheartening answer.

"What a big mountain this must be!" says Mrs. Cardigan.

"It is about twenty miles long," answers Eric, "and contains at least a hundred thousand acres of as dense wilderness as is to be found out of the tropical belt. When we reach Mount Mitchell we shall be in the centre of a region of unbroken forest, without house or road in any direction—except this path and a few trails known only to the hunters—for a radius of ten or twelve miles."

"And it was in this wilderness that Professor Mitchell lost his life sixteen or seventeen years ago, was it not?" I ask.

"Yes. Burnet was one of the men engaged in the search for him. He will tell you all about it. At least five hundred men were in the party, and they searched for days before at last the professor was found—drowned in a mountain-torrent."

Higher and higher we mount—the horses straining steadily upward with few pauses. The forest around us becomes wilder, greener, more luxuriant, with every step. When we wonder at this, Eric bids us observe the rich, black loam which composes the soil. Such gigantic trees as grow here cannot be matched, I am sure, of California. The chestnuts, especially, exceed in girth and height any thing we have ever seen. Other trees correspond in size, and the dense undergrowth makes a sea of impenetrable verdure in every direction.

Presently, however, the aspect of our surroundings changes. We leave this varied forest behind, and enter the region of the balsam, from the dark color of which the mountain takes its name. Above a certain line of elevation no trees are found save these beautiful yet sombre firs. They grow to an immense height, and stand so thickly together that one marvels how any animal larger than a cat can thread its way among their

stems. Overhead the boughs interlock in a canopy, making perpetual shade beneath. No shrubs of any kind are to be found here—only beds of thick, elastic moss, richer than the richest velvet, and ferns in plummy profusion. Putting aside every thing else, it is worth ascending the Black Mountain to see these mosses and ferns. Description can give no idea of their beauty. As lovely ferns may perhaps be found elsewhere—though this is doubtful, since the rich soil, the perpetual moisture, and perpetual shade, foster their growth to the highest possible degree—but one never sees out of the balsam-forests the peculiar moss which is their glory. It is almost rank in its richness; it is more vivid than emerald in its greenness; and there is a delicate grace about it which no other moss possesses. It is more like a fairy forest of miniature palm-leaves than any thing else to which one can liken it.

"What is this?" we ask, as our horses struggle up a steep ascent, and pause on a small plateau, where a double house of balsam-logs stands. All planking, every thing which made the house habitable, is gone, but the stout logs remain firmly fixed together, and look as if they might defy the hand of Time. "Are we on the summit?"

"On the summit!" Eric laughs. "This is only the Mountain House, the summer residence, formerly, of Mr. William Patton, who owned the mountain. You are five thousand four hundred and sixty feet above sea-level, however, and have a most extensive view."

We turn—so dense has been the forest through which we ascended that this is our first glimpse of what we have gained—and see the world unrolled like a map below us, with mountain-ranges in azure billows spreading to the farthest verge of the infinitely distant horizon. It is a picture which almost takes away our breath, and dwarfs into insignificance all else that we have seen. What are the hills and rocks on which we have hitherto stood to this grand mountain-height, with the boundless territory which it overlooks? Eric points out the sweeping lines of the two great ranges which inclose on each side this Eden of the sky, as they trend southward to South Carolina and Georgia, and the innumerable transverse ranges and spurs that cover the face of the country. Far, misty, ocean-like, the magnificent expanse spreads,

looking like a celestial country instead of a common work-day world.

We could linger here for hours, but are imperatively hurried on. Again we plunge into the dark shade of the dense balsams. The path is no more than a trail, which an eye inexperienced in woodcraft could not detect, and the way grows more and more steep. One moment the horses slip on the rocks up which they clamber; the next instant they sink above their fetlocks in black mud; there is barely room for their passage through the close-growing trees; and every few minutes a cry runs along the line, "Look out for your heads!" and we bend down on their necks to escape being scraped off by some leaning tree or low bough. In every direction stretches the sombre, impenetrable forest, and the only things which break the monotony of its gloom are masses of rock piled together in strange, fantastic shapes, and covered with moss and ferns.

Two miles of this steep climbing brings us to the summit of the undulating ridge along which our way lies for several miles farther. The funeral branches of the balsam still overshadow us, but now and then we emerge from this canopy of shade into small, open spaces, lovely enough for a fairy court. Short, green grass flourishes, one or two graceful, hardy trees make a pleasant contrast to the sombre firs, and flat rocks here and there seem provided specially for seats. We would willingly pause in these charming spots, but our guide calls no halt. He seems insensible to fatigue as he presses steadily onward with his long strides, and we are forced to follow, since this mountain wilderness, abounding in precipices and pitfalls, would be an unfavorable place in which to indulge a fancy for straggling. Twice he points out bear-tracks crossing our path, and once he turns aside from the path to show Sylvia the promised bear-trap—a stout erection of large logs.

"When you find a bear in a place like this," she says, regarding it gravely from the height of her mule, "what do you do to him?"

"Shoots him, generally," answers Mr. Burnet, with a broad smile.

"And you call that hunting!" she says, scornfully. "Why, I should think you would feel like a coward to come and shoot a poor trapped animal."

"Looking at the matter in that light, all hunting is cowardly," says Eric. "But if the bear had been stealing your hogs for several months you would probably be willing to shoot him when you found him in a trap.—Lead on, Dan. I am growing—to put it moderately—rather hungry."

Dan leads on, and presently we emerge on the largest and most beautiful of the little prairies through which we have passed. This stretch of open ground lies at the foot of the highest peak, the abrupt sides of which rise in conical shape before us. It is here, Mr. Burnet tells us, that the mountaineers who were searching for Professor Mitchell found the first trace of the way he had taken.

"We had been sarchin' from Friday to Tuesday," he says, "and on Tuesday we was pretty nigh disheartened, when Wilson—an old hunter from over in Yancey—said he hadn't no doubt the professor had tried to go down to Caney Valley by a trail they two had followed thirteen years afore, and which leads that way"—he points down into the dark wilds below us. "Well, we looked along the edge of this here prairie till we found a track. Wilson was right—he *had* tried to go down to Caney Valley. We followed his trail for about four miles, and I was one of them what found him at last."

"He had lost his way," says Eric. "I have seen the spot—they call it Mitchell's Falls now—where he died. A stream of considerable size plunges over a precipice of about forty feet into a basin fourteen feet deep by as many wide. Into this he fell—probably at night."

"But how was it possible to bring a dead body up these steeps?" Sylvia says, addressing Mr. Burnet.

"We brought it in a sheet slung to the top of stout poles," he answers. "Then it were carried down to Asheville, and then brought up again and buried there"—he nods to the peak above us.

"In the warmth of their great friendship and admiration, people thought that he ought to rest in the midst of the scenes he had explored so fearlessly and loved so well," says Eric.

We are all silent. This shadow of death seems to obscure something of the beauty of the wide prospect. We have paused, attracted not only by the gentle loveliness of the spot, but by the magnificence of the far-

stretching view. Immediately in front of us sweeps westward the great range of Craggy, its spurs shutting off Asheville from our view. Beyond, Pisgah lifts its crest, with its surrounding mountains, while behind these range after range melts into illimitable distance, and more than half the counties of the western part of the State lie spread before us. Eric takes his cherished companion—a large field-glass—from its case, and brings it to a proper focus, then he hands it to me.

"Look," he says, "at that cloud-like table-land lying near the South Carolina line—do you see what I mean? That is the upper valley of the French Broad in Transylvania, and it is nearly on a level with the summit of the Blue Ridge."

The glass passes from hand to hand, for we all alight here, since the rest of the ascent can best be made on foot. The saddles are taken from the horses, and they are turned loose to graze until morning.

"Suppose they should run away?" suggests Mr. Lanier, a little aghast at this proceeding; but our guide only laughs.

"They'll not run fur," he says.

"If they did, we should have to walk down the mountain," says Sylvia. "That would be capital fun!"

"Fun which I had rather be spared," says Mrs. Cardigan, taking off her water-proof, which has served as a riding-skirt, and throwing it over her arm.

Only the pack-horse is led to the summit of the peak. We follow, glad to be spared the ascent of the steep and rocky way on horseback. The climbing is laborious, but fortunately short. Before long we gain the top, and the first object on which our eyes rest is—the grave.

Here the friends of the dead professor laid him down, to await the resurrection morning. At his feet the pines sigh their mournful requiem, and the majestic glory of that Nature to which he was so devoted lies spread around. With this loftiest peak of the great Appalachian chain his name is linked effectually. The dome is not likely to be called by any other name than "Mount Mitchell" so long as the first sight which greets those who ascend it is Mitchell's grave.

Beside the grave, the summit is entirely bare. A few yards down its sides the balsam-growth begins; but the firs are stunted, and round the crest of the knob half at least

of them are dead and look like white spectres of trees. A small cabin stood here a year or two ago, but is now burned down—only its chimney remaining.

"Where is the cave? I don't see any cave," says Mrs. Cardigan, looking blankly round as we seat ourselves in an exhausted condition on the scattered rocks that abound.

"The cave is about fifty yards down the side of the peak," says Eric. "Burnet has taken the pack-horse there to unload. As soon as you are rested sufficiently, we had better follow. We can take dinner, and then return here for the view."

Does any one wonder that we rise with alacrity at the sound of that magic word "dinner?" If so, he or she never made a mountain-ascent of six hours in an atmosphere that sharpens the appetite to that positive hunger which in ordinary life we so seldom feel.

Down a path on the other side of the peak we go, and, about fifty yards from the summit, are led to a large rock, one side of which shelves inward to the depth of ten or twelve feet, forming an excellent shelter.

"This was the royal residence of the king of the bears in the good old times when there were no men on these mountains," says Rupert, as we approach. (He is on his knees, assisting Harrison to unpack the provisions.)



In the Cave.

"It serves admirably for bears, but is rather low for people."

"For giants like yourself, very likely,"

says Sylvia. "I can stand upright in it, quite far back, very comfortably—see!"

"And when one sits down it is admirable," says Mrs. Cardigan, suiting the action to the word, and sitting down on a shawl which Mr. Lanier has spread for her.

"Here is a natural cupboard," I say, examining a ledge of rocks that juts out on one side.

"I doubt whether we shall leave anything to go into it," says Charley. "I am famished!"

"Spread the table quicker, Harrison!" cries Sylvia.—"Eric, carve the ham while I cut some bread."

The table is spread—to wit, a miscellaneous collection of eatables are placed on a piece of black oil-cloth—and dinner begins. For some time no other remarks are heard than those which are strictly necessary. Requests are made for bread-and-butter, for another piece of ham or chicken, for pickles or sardines; beyond this, little is said until we look at each other and laugh. By this time the feast is drawing to its close. Canned fruits, cakes, and jelly, are on the table; Charley is opening a bottle of wine.

"Fate cannot harm us, we have dined to-day," says Sylvia. "Oh, were you *ever* so hungry before? I only hope we have left enough for breakfast: we cannot afford to eat any supper."

"Can't we?" says Rupert, looking dismayed. "Why, I think there's a plenty left. We'll have some coffee, at any rate. As soon as Burnet comes back—he has taken the pack-horse down to the others—we are going to make a fire."

"If the wind should be in the wrong direction, we shall suffer dreadfully from the smoke," says Mr. Lanier, looking at the great pile of charred logs immediately in front of our rock-house—remnants of the fire of some other party.

"Better suffer from smoke than from cold," says Eric. "You'll be glad of the fire when night falls; and, in order that you may have it, we must go to work and cut wood enough to last till morning."

"Cut wood!" repeats Mr. Lanier, with a gasp. He has plainly not anticipated anything like this. "You mean that Harrison and the guide will cut it?"

"I mean that it will require several axes to cut as much as we shall need," answers

Eric. "The balsam-wood will not burn in small quantities."

Mr. Lanier does not volunteer to take one of these axes; he looks, on the contrary, greatly disgusted.

"And you call this a pleasure-excursion?" he says.

"A *pleasure exertion* it might better be defined—don't you think so?" asks Mrs. Cardigan, laughing.

"I wondered why you were bringing axes along," says Sylvia, turning to Charley; "and this is what it was for?"

"This is what it was for," he answers. "Now—since we are in a gypsy camp—may I ask leave to light a cigar? 'When Juno ruffles thee, O Jupiter, try the weed'—and, according to my experience, Juno is pretty sure to ruffle one sooner or later; therefore, it is well to be provided with a weed."

"After that, you don't deserve permission to light it," she says, "but I suppose we can't refuse you the privilege which we are willing to grant the others."

At this, cigars are lighted, and, when the bottle of wine has been emptied, we take our way back to the summit.

There the full glory of all that we have come to see bursts upon us. How can one write of it?—how give the faintest idea of the beauty which lies below us on this September day?—how describe the sublimated fairness of the day itself in the rarefied air of this high peak?

"I have never obtained so good a view before!" says Eric. "There are not a dozen days in the year when one can obtain such a view from this mountain."

"What delightful luck that we should have hit one of the dozen!" says Mrs. Cardigan. "Don't you feel as if you overlooked the whole world, and the kingdoms thereof? O Mr. Markham, dear Mr. Markham, tell us what every thing is!"

Dear Mr. Markham proceeds to comply with this moderate request, while Sylvia mounts the chimney, and stands there—field-glass in hand—sweeping the horizon, as he indicates one object after another. Charley sits on the chimney at her feet, swinging his legs meditatively and smoking; Mrs. Cardigan, in her enthusiasm, takes Mr. Lanier's arm.

The view is so immense that one is forced to regard it in sections. Far to the north-

east lies Virginia, from which the long waving line of the Blue Ridge comes, and passes directly under the Black, making a point of junction, near which it towers into the steep

a succession of cone-like peaks, and, as it sweeps round westwardly, it divides into two great branches—one of which terminates in the height on which we stand, while numerous spurs lead off from its base; the other stretches southward, forming the splendid chain of Craggy. At our feet lie the elevated counties of Yancey and Mitchell, with their surface so uniformly mountainous that one wonders how men could have been daring enough to think of making their homes amid such wild scenes.

"The richest lands in the mountains are to be found in those counties," says Eric, when we remark something like this:

"Look at the farms—they scarcely seem more than gardens from our point of view—dotted all over the valleys and rolling table-lands, and even on the mountain-sides. Yet Burnsville, the county-seat, is six hundred feet higher than Asheville."



"Sylvia mounts the chimney, and stands there."

Pinnacle and stately Graybeard—so called from the white beard which it wears when a frozen cloud has iced its rhododendrons. From our greater eminence we overlook the Blue Ridge entirely, and see the country below spreading into azure distance, with white spots which resolve themselves through the glass into villages, and mountains clearly defined. The Linville range—through which the Linville River forces its way in a gorge of wonderful grandeur—is in full view, with a misty cloud lying on the surface of Table Rock, while the peculiar form of the Hawk's Bill stands forth in marked relief. Beyond, blue and limitless as the ocean, the undulating plain of the more level country extends until it melts into the sky.

As the glance leaves this view, and, sweeping back over the Blue Ridge, follows the main ledge of the Black, one begins to appreciate the magnitude of this great mountain. For miles along its dark crest appear

Beyond these counties stretches the chain of the Unaka, running along the line of Tennessee, with the Roan Mountain—famous for its extensive view over seven States—immediately in our front. Through the passes and rugged chasms of this range, we look across the entire valley of East Tennessee to where the blue outlines of the Cumberland Mountains trend toward Kentucky, and we see distinctly a marked depression which Eric says is Cumberland Gap. Turning our gaze due westward, the view is, if possible, still more grand. There the colossal masses of the Great Smoky stand, draped in a mantle of clouds, while through Haywood and Transylvania, to the borders of South Carolina, rise the peaks of the Balsam Mountains, behind which are the Cullowhee and the Nantahala, with the Blue Ridge making a majestic curve toward the point where Georgia touches the Carolinas.

"To understand how much you see," says

Eric—"for such a view is bewildering in its magnitude—you must remember that this elevated country called Western North Carolina is two hundred and fifty miles long, with a breadth varying from thirty to sixty miles, and that you overlook all this—with much more besides."

"With very much more besides," says Charley, "especially in the matter of width. Cumberland Gap is fully a hundred miles away, and the view on the other side of the Blue Ridge is even more extensive."

"You are right—it is bewildering," says Sylvia, dropping the glass, and it is folly to think of seeing such a view in one day or two days. We should remain here for a week at least."

"In that case we'd have to send for more provisions," says Rupert's voice from the rear.

Then Eric rouses with a start to the consciousness that, while the sun is sloping westward, and the shadows are lengthening over all the marvelous scene, a supply of wood for the night has not been cut. The axes of the guide and Harrison are ringing down among the balsam-trees, but he is too experienced a mountaineer to trust entirely to their efforts.

"Come, Rupert," he says, "a little exercise will do you no harm.—Charley, if we need recruits, I'll call you."

"Very good," says Charley, with resignation.

Deserted thus by our instructor, we cease to ask the names of the mountain-ranges or towering peaks. It is enough to sit and watch the inexpressible beauty of the vast prospect as afternoon slowly wanes into evening. There is a sense of isolation, of solemnity and majesty, in the scene which none of us are likely to forget. So high are we elevated above the world, that the pure vault of ether over our heads seems nearer to us than the blue rolling earth, with its wooded hills and smiling valleys below. No sound comes up to us, no voice of water or note of bird breaks the stillness. We are in the region of that eternal silence which wraps the summits of the "everlasting hills." A repose that is full of awe broods over this lofty peak, which still retains the last rays of the sinking sun, while over the lower world twilight has fallen.

CHAPTER XII.

"Once I sat upon a mountain,
Gazing on the mist before me;
Like a great gray sheet of canvas,
Shrouding all things in its cover,
Did it float 'twixt earth and heaven."

TWILIGHT is brief on the summit of the Black. A hundred miles or more away—behind the far peaks and passes of the Tennessee mountains—the sun sinks in a bed of glory, and the last rim of his disk has scarcely disappeared before a soft mantle of darkness falls over us. Then we remember that there is a full moon, and we turn toward the east. Yes, she is coming! There is a glow along the horizon, out of which a yellow shoulder presently appears, and, before the crimson light has faded out of the distant west, the "silver sister-world" has mounted into the blue depths of the eastern sky, and her light streams on the deep chasms and high peaks of the great mountain, with its dark plumage of firs.

Wrapped closely in heavy shawls—for the air is sharply cold—we sit and watch this beauty deepen as dusk gives place to night. Over the immense expanse spread below—from Virginia to Georgia, from Tennessee to South Carolina—a white glamour lies, showing the dim outlines of countless mountains, the dark shadows of unnumbered valleys, and deepening to silver mist where the remote landscape meets the arching sky. Around us this radiance has almost the brightness of day, so rarefied is the air, while the mica—which enters largely into the composition of all the rocks and even of the soil on the surface of the peak—sparkles in the light like precious stones. So brilliantly white is all around, so dark the firs sweeping downward below, so far-stretching and mysterious the immeasurably distant view, that words are hushed on our lips. We are thrilled by the greatness of the silent scene, by the solemnity of the glorious night. To be on this lonely mountain-top, uplifted so high above the world, fills us with a sense of exaltation and awe.

"How still, how vast, how beautiful!" says Sylvia, in a low voice. "How strange to think of the thousands of people scattered below us, going their accustomed social or domestic ways, while we sit here, midway between heaven and earth—alone with the mountains and the moon!"

"And each other," says Mr. Lanier.
 "Pray don't forget that."

"I should like to forget it," she answers, gazing far away over the broken expanse of distant country with something wistful in the expression of her face as the moon shines on it. "I should like to be here entirely alone—for once. It would be something one could never forget."

"I should think not, indeed," says Mrs. Cardigan, with a shudder. "It would be something to set one crazy with fright. It is the most beautiful place I have ever seen; but there is something terrible in its loneliness. Listen! What eerie sound is that?"

"Only the wind sighing among the balsam-trees," answers Charley. "I wish we could hear the cry of a wild-cat. That *does* sound eerie when one is in the woods at night."

"I wish a bear would walk out of those firs," says Sylvia. "Oh, why will nothing ever happen? It seems that our journeyings are doomed to be lamentably tame."

"Tame!" repeats Mr. Lanier, in a tone of amazement. "Why, have we not had storms and floods—"

"Hallo!"—it is Rupert's voice which speaks in the rear—"are you going to stay here all night? The fire's made, and the coffee's made, and Brother Eric says, come down to the cave."

"A very good suggestion," says Mr. Lanier, rising promptly. "It is really exceedingly chilly. A fire will be very welcome."

"Even though one may have to take smoke along with it," says Mrs. Cardigan, mischievously.

The ideas which Rupert's words have presented are more or less pleasing to all of us, so we rise and stumble down the steep path which leads to the cave. A picturesque sight greets us when we come within view of this shelter. Immediately in front of it an enormous fire is burning, lighting up the rugged lichened face of the rock, the group of figures within the cave, and the dark forest around. To our relief, we see that the column of smoke mounts steadily upward, so that we have no annoyance on this score to dread.

"That supply of fuel must be intended to last during the week you wish to stay here, Miss Norwood," says Mrs. Cardigan, pointing to the pile of wood which lies on the far-

ther side of the fire—an imposing pile, certainly, of freshly-cut logs.

"And what are these for?" asks Mr. Lanier, pausing to regard a heap of boughs.

"Those," says Charley, "are the best substitute for mountain heather to be found in this part of the world, and form an excellent bed.—Well, Eric, you have succeeded in making the balsam-wood burn for once."

"It burns as well as any other wood if you put enough on," answers Eric.

"And if you keep puttin' on," says the guide, a little dryly.

We declare that it is delightful, and certainly the red heart of the fire is beautiful when we draw near and seat ourselves in front of it. Harrison lifts the coffee-pot from the coals on which it is placed, cups are produced and filled, a paper of sugar is handed round, slices of ham are broiled on the coals, Sylvia volunteers to toast some bread, but ends by deputing Rupert to do it under her direction. While we talk and laugh, and the vivid glare of the fire lights up the gypsy scene, the silver moon looks serenely down upon us—for our cave faces due east—as if with a large-minded tolerance for human weakness.

After this we are sufficiently tired to think of rest. Even Sylvia owns that her eyes are slightly heavy.

"We were waked at such a barbarous hour this morning!" she says, by way of excuse for this fact.

"And you will be waked at a still more barbarous hour to-morrow morning, if you want to see the sunrise," says Eric.

"I don't know what the rest may be," says Rupert, yawning, "but I'm dead tired."

"I am going to the peak for one last look," says Sylvia. "After that I suppose I must yield to the infirmities of nature, and sleep like a log while all this beauty is holding the world under a spell of enchantment."

"Are you going to the peak again?" asks Mrs. Cardigan, addressing me in a highly dissuasive tone. "I don't think I shall."

"I don't think I can," I answer. "I have exhausted my power of climbing for the present. We will go out in front of the cave while Eric and Mr. Burnet prepare our sleeping-apartment."

"Yes, we can see the moon very well from here, and have the benefit of the fire,

too," says Mrs. Cardigan, stepping from under the shadow of the rock.

I step out also, and am amused to observe how Mr. Lanier hesitates for a minute, uncertain whether to follow Sylvia, who is mounting the path leading to the summit of the peak, or to remain with us.

If the former had given one backward glance, his hesitation would have been short; but she gives none. Whether he comes or not is plainly a matter on which she does not bestow a thought, as, with Charley's assistance, she springs lightly up the rock-strewn way. Almost any man in such a situation

full tide of flirtation; so, feeling myself *de trop*, I rise and stroll away.

Eric and Mr. Burnet, assisted by Rupert and Harrison, are making our couch, an operation which I watch with considerable interest and amusement. First an oil-cloth is spread, then a number of balsam-twigs are strewed thickly, and over these quilts and shawls are placed.

"There!" says Eric, turning to me when the last has been laid. "If you don't call that a good bed, you don't know what a good bed is! I should not mind sleeping on it every night."



"Sylvia volunteers to toast some bread."

would be piqued. Mr. Lanier is no exception to the rule. He turns to Mrs. Cardigan, and remarks that he is too tired for further climbing.

"We will sit down here," he says, pointing to a flat, convenient stone, "and enjoy the moonlight without fatiguing ourselves."

We sit down, but the moon receives an exceedingly small share of the attention of my companions. Mrs. Cardigan devotes herself to the entertainment of Mr. Lanier, Mr. Lanier returns the compliment by devoting himself to the entertainment of Mrs. Cardigan. In fifteen minutes they are launched in

"Perhaps that is because you have made it yourself," I say, with a laugh. "One is apt to think well of one's own handiwork."

But I am constrained to admit, when I try the bed, that it is very comfortable, the balsam-boughs being in a measure elastic, and their fresh, spicy odor full of delightful woodland suggestions. I wrap my water-proof round me, take a satchel for a pillow, curl down, and fall asleep, while figures are still passing to and fro around the ruddy fire, and the silver splendor of the night lies beyond.

I am dimly conscious of voices talking, of other figures lying down, and of quietness presently, only broken now and then by a

scuffle (apparently between Charley and Rupert) on the subject of cover, or by some one rising to replenish the fire. About midnight I overhear, in a state between sleeping and waking, the following conversation :

"Hallo, Dan!"—it is Eric's voice which speaks—"what has come over the night? Isn't it cloudy?"

"Tol'ably cloudy," answers Dan—he is standing by the fire which he has just replenished—"the clouds seem to be gatherin' pretty thick. We'll be in the midst of 'em by mornin'."

"Fine prospect for a sunrise," says Eric.

"Capital prospect for sleeping late," remarks Charley, in a somnolent tone of voice.

I hear no more. I, too, am indifferent to the sunrise, so, shifting my satchel a little, I drop off to sleep again. Incredible as it may seem to those who have never tried such quarters, I never rested with a greater sense of pleasure and refreshment than on this bed of balsam under a mountain-rock.

When I wake next a voice is saying, "Time to be up!—half-past four o'clock," and I open my eyes to see a dark figure standing in front of the smouldering fire—a figure which I know by the carriage of the shoulders and head to be Eric—while another figure (that of Mr. Burnet) is bringing wood from the diminished pile, and all around are the recumbent outlines of the sleeping party. Far and faint in the east—infinately distant, it seems—a pale streak of light lies along the verge of the horizon, and, seeing this, I rise to a sitting posture.

"Oh, we *are* going to have a sunrise, after all!" I say.

"There is generally something of that kind in the morning," says Eric; "and it takes place sooner on a mountain than in the lower world, so you had better rouse your neighbors."

I proceed at once to shake each of them, while Eric rouses the masculine sleepers very summarily. There is a little grumbling and much yawning on the part of the latter; then they rise and gather round the fire, which by this time is burning brightly. By this time, also, the glow in the east has widened, so we do not pause for any toilet-arrangements, but, pulling the hoods of our water-proofs over our heads, announce that we are ready.

We climb the peak in the cold, gray

dawn, with just enough of dim light to show us a mist lying all around.

"Why, there is a fog!" says Mrs. Cardigan.

"A fog!" repeats Eric. "It is a cloud, which has been hovering over us since midnight."

"Then we can't see the sunrise!" cries a disgusted chorus.

"We may see a very fine sunrise if the clouds continue as at present to lie below. They have been up around us two or three times, but now the breeze has blown them off, and we overlook them."

He is right. When we gain the summit, we find a sea of vapor spread below us, out of which nothing appears but the peak on which we stand, and on our left the dark dome of Craggy, toward which the moon is sloping. We are in the midst of a boundless ocean, on the distant limit of which the sunrise glow is growing brighter.

Of this wonderful glow—which momentarily waxes greater—it is difficult to write without seeming to verge on rhapsody. For once in our lives we realize what the daily miracle which we call sunrise is. Along at least half the circle of the horizon a flushing radiance extends, infinitely varied in its combinations of color. There is not a tint known to earth, or sea, or sky, which does not find a place on the wide, changing belt of splendor—and many of them are so exquisite that we can only liken them to the colors of the purest gems. There are seas of aqua-marine and chrysolite, there are clouds of ruby and gold, of amethyst and jacinth. And from the rocky point on which we stand to this heaven of beauty, nothing intervenes save a vast expanse of mist, over which the luminous glory falls, gilding with prismatic radiance its myriad waves.

The most careless of us stand enthralled by the majesty of the spectacle—forgetful of our appearance, indifferent to the sharp coldness of the morning air. Even Rupert, with his hands in his pockets and a large plaid shawl of Sylvia's over his shoulders, gazes in open-eyed wonder and admiration, while Mr. Burnet—who has probably beheld a thousand sunrises from mountain-peaks—is roused sufficiently to say, "Now, that's pretty—ain't it?"

Suddenly some one exclaims, "Look at the moon!" and we turn abruptly around.

That luminary is half-obscured by clouds as it sinks slowly behind Craggy—and these clouds have caught the eastern glory. The moon herself is more yellow than silver in the reflected light, and the vapors which surround her are crimson and rose-color, burnished with gold. The effect is beyond all description. We scarcely know whether to gaze at the east or the west, and we turn from one point to another in a kind of enraptured distraction.

"Well," says Eric, "the person who does not feel that he or she is repaid for the ascent of the Black by *this*, need never hope to be repaid for any exertion. You might come here for a dozen years without witnessing such a sight again!"

"We are a hundred-fold repaid," says Sylvia. "See! yonder comes the sun. How long has his preparation for rising lasted?"

"An hour," answers Charley, glancing at his watch. "It was a quarter to five when we gained the peak, and the first flush of color lay along the east; it is a quarter to six now, when the sun appears over the horizon."

"What an enchanted hour it has been!" says Sylvia, with a soft sigh. She stands still, watching with level eyes the refulgent glory, from which the rest of us turn away our dazzled gaze. Over her fair face, framed in its dark hood, the kindling sunlight falls, showing the pearly freshness of her complexion, and touching to gold the light waves of hair around her brow.

"What a thing it is to be young!" says Mrs. Cardigan, in a tone of half-unconscious envy. "With such a skin as *that* one can afford to face a sunrise, but I know that I am looking frightfully fallow, so I shall return to the cave to practise a few toilet arts. Good-morning!"

She draws her hood farther over her face—"like a witch in a play," she says, laughing—declines any escort, and flits away.

No one else moves. We are lost in admiration of the marvelous beauty which grows greater rather than less now that the sun has risen. The sea itself conveys no stronger impression of immensity than the boundless ocean of vapor which we overlook.

"It has been the dream of my life to be above the clouds," cries Sylvia, "and now I am!"

"You certainly are," says Eric. "No ray of the sunlight which bathes us, pierces through this canopy."

"One feels as if one might launch a boat on it," says Charley.

"Yonder is an island or two," says Mr. Lanier, pointing eastward. Several islands appear on the verge of the horizon—the most elevated points of the Blue Ridge piercing the clouds.

"Yonder is the crest of the Grandfather—which was formerly thought to be the highest Appalachian mountain," says Eric.

"I suppose that was in the days when the Black was called the Negro Mountain," says Charley. "By Jove, what a sight! We have the Atlantic on one side and the Pacific on the other."

"Or rather we have a picture of the Deluge when the waters began to abate from the face of the earth," says Sylvia. The mist is moving—see!—Eric, will it lift after a while?"

"Very likely it *may* lift—and envelop us," answers Eric.

"I think you are mistaken," remarks Mr. Lanier. "The clouds are passing away. Look in this direction."

Our eyes follow the direction of his hand, and we see that the clouds are undoubtedly passing away from that portion of the view which lies between us and Tennessee. The great hills of Mitchell and Yancey stand fully revealed in the clear light and long shadows of early morning—though the valleys are still transformed to beautiful, tremulous lakes of mist.

In her enthusiasm Sylvia calls upon Charley to assist her to the top of the chimney again. "I must see all that can be seen," she says. "I don't know that I shall ever witness another sunrise from the summit of the Black."

"It has been very fine, indeed," says Mr. Lanier, "but one is enough, I think."

Then this gentleman, like Mrs. Cardigan, retires for some finishing touches to his toilet—a matter which has plainly weighed on his mind for some time.

"Poor Lanier!" says Charley. "He could not enjoy the view from Mont Blanc if his collar was rumpled, his cravat awry, or his hair out of accurate wave."

"It does not become you to laugh at him," says Sylvia, who never fails to defend

her admirer—when he is absent. "Because collars and cravats are of no importance to you, and Nature has curled your hair so that it looks better disordered than any other way, is no reason for making game of more fastidious and less fortunate persons."

"I am not making game of him," says Charley, "though, by Jove! if I tried—however, it does not matter.—Alice, I want you to witness something which this young lady promised me last night."

"Very well," I answer, placidly. I am on one side of the chimney and Charley on the other, while Sylvia stands on top. The rest have disappeared—Eric, Mr. Burnet, and Rupert, on thoughts of breakfast intent. I am more interested in the far, blue peaks of the Unaka, and the distant range of the Cumberland, than in anything Sylvia may have promised, but I am ready to be obliging, so I say, "Very well."

"Now, Charley," says that young lady, in a warning tone, "mind you tell the truth."

"I always do," replies Charley, virtuously.—"Well, Alice, you know that she has been in the habit of treating me with—well, I desire to be moderate, so I will say, with great want of consideration."

"You know, Alice," says Sylvia, "that I was obliged to keep him in his place—else what would become of him?"

"Query, what is my place?" asks Charley. "At your feet?"

"A very good place," she remarks, coolly. "You might find many worse. Please don't let me fall— Oh!"

Charley restores her to her proper balance, and then turns again to me.

"Regarding this fact," he says, "together with the corresponding fact that I have never been in love with any woman but herself, not even for a day in all my life—"

"What a story!" says the person on the chimney. "Charley, you ought to be ashamed! You never dared to tell me such an untruth! I should at once have reminded you of Sue Collins and Adèle Dupont, not to speak of Miss Hollis—"

"That is nonsense," says Charley. "If we began to talk of flirtations, I could bring forward a list of *your* amusements that would double mine."

"A woman has a right to flirt" (dogmatically).

"Oh! has she?" (skeptically). "That is

a right I never heard claimed before—though it is certainly well practised. All this is straying from the subject, however.—The long and short of the matter is, Alice, that she promised last night to think of me, and I want you to stand witness to the fact."

"Why should I do anything of the kind?" I ask. "Are you foolish enough to fancy that 'thinking of you' means anything more than giving you a sop to keep you quiet? You ought to know Sylvia better after all these years."

"Oh, how shameful!" cries Sylvia, "to slander me in that manner, and to talk of 'all these years,' as if I were thirty-five!"

"'Old in guile if not in years,'" quotes Charley.—"I suppose you are right, Alice. I suppose I *am* a fool. I have nothing in particular to offer, while Lanier is abundantly gifted with the substantial charms which win a woman's heart—or at least her hand."

"If you think *that*," cries Sylvia, "you may consider that I take back all I said last night.—Alice, I submit to you—"

"Pray excuse me," I say. "Settle it between yourselves. No good ever comes of introducing a third person into love-making or flirtation."

With this I walk away, and leave them to fight it out according to their usual custom. The result, as I afterward learn from Charley, is by no means definite. "I'm much where I was before," he says. "Sylvia has promised nothing."

"And she never will promise anything," I say, for his comfort. "If there is one thing that Sylvia is averse to, it is binding herself to anything. Perhaps she means to settle the matter according to romantic precedent. She will fall into a torrent or over a precipice, and reward whoever rescues her with the inestimable treasure of her hand."

"I shall look out for precipices and torrents, then, with great interest," says Charley. "Lanier might easily break *his* neck over one, but he will never rescue any one else."

These remarks are exchanged in a corner of the cave during breakfast—which is taken whenever, wherever, and however one likes. During its progress we begin to perceive that Eric was right—a cloud is settling on the mountain. It comes up around

us like a white fog, so dense that one might cut a slice and take it home, Rupert observes.

"Surely it will lift after a while," we say, despondently, since few of us are not anxious for another glimpse of the great view; but Mr. Burnet shakes his head.

"Tisn't likely," he says. "There's goin' to be a change of weather shortly, and the Black's gatherin' clouds. There won't be another clear view to be had from this peak fur a week."

"O Mr. Burnet!" cries Sylvia, in a tone of appeal, "I have set my heart on seeing the view again. I had not time to *take it in* yesterday. Don't you think, if we staid till noon, the cloud might lift?"

"I'm afraid there ain't any hope of it," says Mr. Burnet, shaking his head regretfully.

"Come, come," says Eric, "if you knew how uncertain the view from the Black is, you would be grateful for what you have had without fretting over what you can't get. We may as well go down, for we shall see nothing more."

With this ultimatum we are forced to be content; so, after a farewell to the cave, we ascend the peak to find the fog-like mist encompassing us on all sides. Even Craggy is shut off from our view; indeed, at a few yards distant every object becomes indistinct.

"We are wrapped in a cloud," says Sylvia, whom this fact partly consoles for the loss of the view.

"So we see—and feel," says Mrs. Cardigan, drawing a shawl around her, for the dampness of the cloud is exceedingly penetrating.

There is a general putting on of wraps; then we go down to the prairie, where Mr.

Burnet and Harrison have the horses saddled and ready. We mount, and, with the cloud condensing moisture all around us, set our faces down the mountain.

"I believe," says Charley, addressing Sylvia, "that I have heard you express a wish to be lost in the mountains. Here is a golden opportunity for such an adventure. You have only to drop behind, to lose the path a little, and you will be lost in a wilderness where we might search for days and weeks without finding you."

"But how is one to drop behind when one is mounted on a mule that will not go anywhere but in front?" she asks, pulling with fruitless energy at the rein of her lively, irrepressible animal.



The Descent.

This descent of the mountain is not likely to be forgotten by any of us. Through the dark balsam-firs, past beds of exquisite moss and graceful ferns, we wind in single

file, doing no more than keep in sight of the figure immediately in front. All around is the dense, white cloud, the moisture of which, like fine rain on a winter day, washes our faces and covers our garments. I laugh when I turn and look at Eric, who is riding behind me. He has pulled his hat over his brows and his overcoat-collar up round his ears, but the ends of his long mustache are dripping with crystal drops, and himself and his steed looming gigantically large through the mist, which seems to possess a magnifying power. Now and then I catch a glimpse of the line of figures ahead, and they resemble a procession of muffled spectres more than the cavalcade which only yesterday set forth so "gayly bedight."

We do not leave the cloud until we have passed out of the region of the firs, and entered the fair green forest, in which we hear again the voice of the impetuous streams as they come rushing down the mountain-ravines. Here, to our surprise, we find half-cloudy sunlight, which grows brighter as we ride downward, until it is beaming on us with oppressive heat, as we dismount, tired and jaded, at the door of "Patton's."

CHAPTER XIII.

"All by the shady greenwood-tree
The merry, merry archers roam;
Jovial and bold and ever free,
They tread their woodland home."

"AND where," asks Aunt Markham, resignedly, "are we going next?"

"We are going," answers Eric, "to Transylvania, which I consider, take it all in all, the loveliest county in the mountains."

"Then it must be a remarkable county," says Mrs. Cardigan, looking up from a map which she is studying with Mr. Lanier—this has become one of our chief amusements since we obtained a bird's-eye view of the country from the summit of the Black.

"It is a remarkable country for deer," says Charley. "I am glad to hear that we are going there.—But why not venture a little farther, Eric?—why not carry this party of intrepid explorers into the Balsam Mountains?"

"Because it is too wild a region," answers Eric. "We are not prepared for anything so remote from civilization."

"For Heaven's sake," says Aunt Markham, with energy, "don't let us go into any wilder region than we have been in already! It is very well for young people to profess to enjoy hardships, but at my age one prefers the comforts of life—at least to the extent of a bed to sleep on and a roof over one's head."

"My dear aunt," says Sylvia, "that idea springs entirely from a misconception. If you would only try once the delight of sleeping in the open air on balsam-boughs, you would never rest until you had tried it again."

"Very likely, indeed!" says Aunt Markham, with profound skepticism. "I hope Eric will believe that I have no desire to try such a thing once."

"I believe it thoroughly," says Eric, "and will take care that you are not forced to do so.—Never mind, Sylvia; next summer we will start out on horseback, take a tent, and thoroughly explore the Balsam and the Nantahala Mountains."

"Thanks," says Sylvia, "but next summer is so very far away! I have never outgrown the childish feeling of wanting a pleasure at once if I am to have it at all. How do I know what may happen before next summer?"

"Life is very uncertain," says Mrs. Cardigan, laughing. "When summer comes, you may be married and gone to Switzerland for your wedding-tour."

Instead of blushing, Sylvia looks haughty.

"I was not alluding to anything of that kind," she says. Then she turns to Charley—poor Charley, who is not likely to be able to afford a wedding-tour to Switzerland.—"You have been to the Balsam Mountains," she says. "Tell me all about them. Is the country *very* wild?"

"It is exceedingly wild," he replies. "Eric is right; we are not fitted out for going there this summer. In a tour of that description one must prepare for *roughing* of every description."

Failing the Balsam Mountains—against which a majority of the party strongly vote—it is decided that we turn our faces toward Transylvania.

As I predicted, Mrs. Cardigan makes one of our party. "As far as Cæsar's Head," she says. "There I expect to meet some friends."

"I don't believe that she expects to meet

anybody at all," says Aunt Markham, confidentially. "I believe that she has simply determined to make Eric fall in love with her, and—O Alice, do you think he will?"

I laugh.

"It is impossible to say," I answer, "but I don't think he will. If Eric ever marries—which is doubtful—he will not be likely to choose a beguiling widow for his wife."

Notwithstanding this opinion, I am forced to admit that the beguiling widow in question makes herself so agreeable that even Eric is partial to her society, and when we start she is on the front seat of the phaeton by his side.

After a day or two of rest, how glad we are to be in motion once more, and how we pity the people who are forced to remain stationary at tiresome springs and in village-hotels! Even when there is nothing in especial to be seen, it is a delight to be in the open air, with the picturesque country spread around one, to bowl over good roads, to cross flashing streams, to feel the pleasant breeze in one's face, to watch the shadows on the hills, or the bosky depths of green woods. How many trivial yet delightful things occur in the course of such journeyings! There are wayside lunches on mossy rocks; there are fruit-trees to be rifled, and hills to be climbed; there are inhabitants of the country to be cross-questioned with regard to distances, concerning which no two give the same account; there are roads to be lost and found—above all, there are many jests and much gay laughter, and the infinite freshness and sweetness of Nature in all the wide and varying scene, the bending sky, and streaming sunshine.

"Why does not everybody spend the summer in this manner?" says Mrs. Cardigan, enthusiastically. "It is true that women, poor creatures! have not much more choice with regard to their holidays than with regard to anything else; but men are different. How *they* can prefer lounging about a watering-place to traveling in this manner is something I cannot understand."

"The best class of men—those with most manliness about them—do not prefer it," says Eric. "You rarely find them among the dancers in hotel-ballrooms or the loungers on hotel-piazzas. But you may meet them by the hundreds with fishing-rods and rifles all through these mountains. Yonder is a party of the kind now."

He points as he speaks to a wagon which we are in the act of passing. It contains a tent and other provisions for camping out. Half a dozen young men in hunting-shirts—several of them carrying guns on their shoulders—tramp alongside. They lift their hats as we pass, showing sunburned faces beneath—the faces of gentlemen unmistakably. Eric returns their salutation, and then inquires—

"Where bound?"

"To the Balsam Mountains, for fishing and hunting," answers one of the number.

"Hope you'll have good luck."

"Much obliged."

We all bow and smile—then glance back as we wind round a curve of the road, in time to see the equestrian members of our party halt and speak to them. Charley apparently finds an acquaintance, for a general hand-shaking takes place.

"Now Sylvia is in her element," says Eric. "How she will question those fellows, and indirectly flatter them, and set them at their ease by her cordial frankness! In ten minutes she will draw out of them all their information—and anything else they may possess."

"I never knew any one with a greater gift of winning the popular heart than she possesses," says Mrs. Cardigan. "What an invaluable wife she would make for a politician!"

"Such a gift loses its value and much of its charm when it is turned to a purpose of that kind," I remark.

We drive on, and some time elapses before anything more is seen of the riders. Then Sylvia, attended by Mr. Lanier, comes up at a canter, and the first thing we perceive is a brace of pheasants hanging over the horn of her saddle.

"Did you see those delightful young men?" she asks. "Charley's friend Grimes—you've heard him talk of Grimes, haven't you?—is one of them. I was very glad, for I wanted to question them all about where they were going. They have been to the Roan, and now they are going on a hunting-trip to the Balsam. Oh, I wish I could go! Charley says he thinks *he* will."

"Did Grimes give you those?" asks Eric, pointing to the birds.

"No, another one—very handsome, with a dark mustache—gave them to me. I did

not want to take them, but he insisted—and won't they be delicious?"

"Very," answers Eric. "Now if we can only meet another party with a slaughtered deer, and you will be good enough to cajole that out of them, we shall fare royally."

"Cajole!" repeats Sylvia, indignantly. "Didn't they *press* me to take these?" she asks, turning to Mr. Lanier.

"Certainly they did," assents that gentleman, promptly.

Presently Charley appears within conversational distance, and Eric accosts him.

"What is this I hear?" he inquires—"are you thinking of turning deserter?"

"I was strongly tempted," the other answers, "but on the whole I have decided to stand by you all. No doubt we'll get some good hunting at Buck Forest."

We are at this time traveling once more along the banks of the French Broad, though we can scarcely fancy that this tranquil river, with its glassy current and smiling valley, is one with the impetuous stream which a little later tears its headlong way through the heart of the mountains. No river could be more placid and well-behaved than it is here. We do not follow its course very long, but bear away across a comparatively level though very elevated country. Evidences of thrift and prosperity abound. One farm succeeds another in rapid succession, while the houses, as a rule, are large and comfortable. We pass the lovely valleys of the Mills and Davidson Rivers, with breadths of fertile lowlands in the foreground and purple-crested hills beyond, miles of rustling corn and broad meadows sowed in grass. All the rugged features of mountain landscape have disappeared; a pastoral softness fills the outlines of every picture, while a freshness of which words can convey but a faint idea rests over the land, and the atmosphere seems with every mile to grow purer and more stimulating.

We take our dinner by the roadside, on the shady banks of the Davidson. This river is short in its course, being a tributary of the French Broad, but no stream carries a more limpid current through fairer scenes.

"One might spend a week in exploring it," says Eric. "The scenery is romantic in the extreme."

"And its head-waters abound, in trout," says Charley.

"If we stopped to explore everything, we should never have done," says Aunt Markham, who feels that it is very necessary to restrain the wandering inclinations of the party.

"Really now," says Mr. Lanier, "are you in earnest about the trout? Since I haven't seen one yet, my skepticism may be excused."

"You haven't been at any place where you *could* see one—except on the Black, and nobody had time for trout-fishing there," says Charley. "The speckled trout are only found in the purest and coldest streams—generally on the north sides of mountains. If you joined those fellows whom we passed going to the Balsam, you would soon be able to catch more than you'd know what to do with."

"I am not sufficiently anxious to catch them to be willing to endure all the discomforts which those fellows are going to encounter," says Mr. Lanier. "Our mode of traveling is quite adventurous enough, I think."

"Quite," says Aunt Markham.

Nobody else indorses this opinion, but those who utter it are too well convinced of its soundness to need any indorsement. The rest of us merely laugh. One does not feel inclined to argument with crystal water swirling gently by, and boughs interlacing overhead, through the greenness of which one catches glimpses of a sky blue as the heart of a turquoise.

"'Not Ariel lived more merrily
Under the blossoming bough than we,'"

says Sylvia. "Who wants to play a game of whist? This is one of those periods in a journey when one does not care in the least about moving on."

Since John and Harrison are engaged in taking their dinner, and the horses are still munching the oats which have been purchased at a neighboring farmhouse for them, this proposal is very well received; and the cards are produced. Mrs. Cardigan and Eric play against Sylvia and Mr. Lanier—the table being a convenient rock. Charley and I look on and offer unasked advice to the players. Aunt Markham leans back between the spreading roots of a large oak, and takes a refreshing nap against its trunk. There is a ford in the river not far from us, and a

countryman who drives his ox-cart into the water, and pauses for the poor patient beasts to drink, looks amused at the scene before him.

We linger so long that Eric shakes his head when we finally start again.

"I don't know where we shall spend the



Aunt Markham's Nap.

night," he says. "This delay has altogether upset my calculations."

"Serves you right for making such things!" says Charley. "It is a mistake in a journey like ours. We should loiter as we like during the day, and trust to luck for the night's shelter."

"I had rather trust to something more definite," says Aunt Markham. "Eric, where did you expect to spend the night?"

"I expected to spend it at Buck Forest," answers Eric, "but we can't possibly reach there now."

"It does not matter," says Sylvia, cheerfully. "There are plenty of houses along the road where we can stop and improve our knowledge of the manners and customs of Arcadia."

"That might be an agreeable prospect," says Mrs. Cardigan, "if it was not so entirely an Arcadian custom to fry a chicken in

a pound of lard, and to provide one with a feather-bed to sleep on."

The serene brightness of afternoon is spread over the land, as we travel on at a rapid pace—for the roads are smooth turn-pikes along which the horses trot gayly. Far and wide the varied prospect extends, bathed in golden sunlight, flecked by deep shadows. It is nearly sunset when we cross the French Broad once more—a much narrower stream now, flowing swiftly under the bridge over which we pass. Then we have our first glimpse of the magic beauty which will some day make Transylvania famous! The valley of the river lies before us like a garden—a level expanse of cultivated greenness, curving away to the right—where, framing its broad fields and gently-swelling hills, there stretches along the entire western horizon a range of the most beautiful mountains which we have seen—the most beautiful, I think, which can be seen anywhere. Nothing can surpass the grace of their undulating outlines, the marvelous purity of their tints. They stand, like the very heights of heaven, against the evening sky—softly and ineffably fair—with the pastoral landscape spread at their feet.

We cross the lovely valley with this view before our eyes. From the great hills long shadows stretch; all manner of sweet, fresh odors are on the dewy air; no sapphire is half so blue as the peaks behind which the sun is setting with such majesty that a wonderful glow lights up the entire sky; in the east, over the dark, wooded hills that bound the prospect, some fleecy clouds are floating, which catch the splendor and turn to tenderest rose upon the deep-blue ether.

"This is Arcadia!" says Sylvia. "We have reached it at last! By many ways, through many scenes have we come—but never before have we found such a scene as this!"

"It is the fairest valley in the mountains!" says Eric, regarding it with pride and admiration.

Even Aunt Markham is so much absorbed that she has forgotten to ask where we are to spend the night, but the deepening shades of twilight recall this question to her mind. She looks round apprehensively.

"I hope you don't mean to travel after night, Eric," she says. "In the mountains it is *very* dangerous, and the moon does not rise until late."

"I shall not travel after night if I can help it," answers Eric, touching up the horses. "I think I know a place about two miles from here where we can stop. I don't promise you excellent accommodation, however."

"Oh, never mind about that," says Mrs. Cardigan. "We have learned not to be fastidious."

"But we should like, if possible, to be comfortable," says Aunt Markham, with an expression of anxiety.

So, on through the deepening dusk we drive—leaving the French Broad Valley behind, but keeping in sight the graceful range of mountains with the sunset pomp dying away beyond. O wild and beautiful country, elevated so far above the rest of the world, and encircled by granite barriers, if it were possible to write down all that makes your charm, how soon fame would come to you!—but, then, perhaps fault-finding tourists and inane pleasure-seekers might come too, so that your virgin freshness would be brushed away, and the nymphs and dryads which now seem to haunt the depths of your valleys and the far retreats of your hills, would vanish altogether.

Presently—when twilight has purpled and softened all the scene, when the rosy clouds have become gray, filmy vapors, and only a golden glow is left of the sunset pageant—we bowl down to another stretch of lowland.

"Transylvania seems to be rich in rivers," I remark. "Pray, what stream is this?"

"Little River," answers Eric, whose foot is now indeed on his native heath, since he has fished in these waters, and hunted over these hills, until both are thoroughly familiar to him. "And yonder is the house where I hope we can stay all night."

He points with his whip as he speaks, and we follow the gesture with our glance. After some of our experiences in the matter of wayside lodging, this which we behold appears very encouraging. It is a comfortable farmhouse, placed near the road, with rich fields stretching back, and wooded heights rising near at hand.

"Leaving here," remarks Eric, "the road turns abruptly around those hills, and enters a gorge, hemmed by mountains on one side and the river on the other.—If these people won't take us in, you must decide, mother,

whether you had rather dare the dangers of the pass, or—camp out."

"I'll wait to decide until they refuse to take us in," says Aunt Markham, philosophically.

They do not refuse. Hospitality—that great virtue which is always more or less associated with a pastoral life—now, as ever, pleads in our behalf. The woman of the house at first demurs.

"We are not prepared to accommodate travelers," she says; "we are not accustomed to takin' them in."

But, when Eric represents that if we are *not* taken in our strait will be desperate, she yields at once.

"You may come in, then," she says, "and I'll do my best to oblige you."

After this, we cannot be ungrateful enough to find fault—even if fault there was to find. When they have opened their doors, these mountain people seem to open their hearts as well, and no one can travel through the country without receiving much kindness and invariable civility—unless his experience be widely different from ours.

The carriages are relieved of their multifarious luggage, the trunks are taken into the house, we make a brief survey of the apartments assigned to us, and then gather on the piazza in the cool, clear dusk, while our hostess betakes herself to the kitchen, whence an ominous fizzling sound soon proceeds.

"O that frying-pan!" says Sylvia, with a groan. "I wish I could make a bonfire of every one in existence!"

"You don't know what cruel desolation you would inflict on a large proportion of your fellow-creatures," says Charley.

"I should enjoy inflicting it," she says, vindictively. "Yonder are two men coming in! I wonder if they are belated travelers? Why, Charley, it's—it's Grimes and another one!"

At this lucid statement we all turn. "Grimes" and the "other one" have entered the gate, and are now approaching the piazza.

"If you come for lodging, you are too late," Charley says, with a laugh. "We have engaged all the apartments of this hotel."

"By Jove, it's Kenyon!" says one of the young men. Then they doff their hats to the party. "We thought you were ever so

far ahead of us," the speaker goes on. "How do you come to be here?"

"We idled so long at mid-day that we fell short of our place of destination," Eric answers. "I am sorry for the fact if you have come for lodging."

"For lodging!" they repeat. "We have come for some milk. Our tent is pitched a little distance from here."

"I'll pilot you to the kitchen," says Charley. "We haven't engaged all the milk."

They return presently, laughing and talking—their tin bucket full of the desired fluid—linger to exchange a few remarks, give us a cordial invitation to visit their camp, and then take their departure.

"What delightful times they must have!" says Sylvia, watching them enviously; "*what* a thing it is to be a man!"

"Sometimes it is very much of a thing to be a woman," observes Mr. Lanier.

When supper is over, Sylvia, Charley, and Rupert, announce their intention of going to the camp, and Mrs. Cardigan, Mr. Lanier, Eric, and myself, decide to accompany them. The walk is very pleasant. Starlight is beautiful in all places—a vague, shadowy light which gives infinite play to the imagination—but it is specially beautiful and marvelously bright in this land of the sky. We stroll along the road, hearing the soft rush of water in the semi-darkness, conscious of many different floating odors, and with a dim outline of spreading valley and dark hills around. Above, the magnificent arch of heaven is ablaze with myriads of stars—jewel-like worlds throbbing in their strange, silent glory through all the wide realm of space.

Before we reach our destination, we catch the ruddy gleam of a fire, and hear a sound of familiar music.

"By George, they've got a fiddle!" cries Rupert, enthusiastically.

He darts forward eagerly. We turn a sharp bend of the path, and the camp is before us. What is more picturesque than such a scene? The bright glow of the fire extends over a radius of several yards, lighting up fantastically the tangled depths of foliage on a neighboring hillside and the vine-draped face of a great rock. The tent is pitched near—behind which an unseen stream murmurs over its stones. The wagon stands at some distance. Over the foreground the party are scattered in various attitudes, smok-

ing like so many volcanoes. On a large stone immediately in front of the fire sits the fiddler—a negro, whose foot keeps time, and whose body sways with the music.

"I didn't know that you carried a musician along with you, Grimes," says Charley, when we have been welcomed and introduced to the circle.

"Oh, that fellow does double duty," answers Grimes. "He drives the wagon all day and plays the fiddle all night—at least, as much of the night as we'll allow him to



The Fiddler.

play. He doesn't make bad music, either, as fiddlers go."

"He makes uncommonly good music," says Sylvia, who evidently finds difficulty in keeping her feet still. "What excellent time!" she goes on, addressing Mrs. Cardigan. "Wouldn't you like to dance?"

Before that lady can answer, two or three of the young men speak eagerly.

"Why shouldn't you dance if you would like it?" they inquire. "It's what *we* have been pining for to such an extent that we have several times danced with each other."

"But where can we dance?" asks Mrs. Cardigan, glancing round.

"On the ground, like fairies," says Eric.

'In the house we left a few minutes ago," says Charley. "There's quite a large room there. We'll take the fiddler and go back."

So, accompanied by the fiddler and the majority of the party, we return to the house. One or two of the gentlemen demur slightly on the score of their appearance, but, having been assured by Sylvia that their flannel hunting-shirts are very picturesque and altogether appropriate to the occasion, they consent to enter the saloon, which is magnificently lighted by two tallow-candles placed on a mantel-piece so high that a per-

We dance several quadrilles, try a waltz or two, and close with an old-fashioned reel. During this last the mirth grows fairly uproarious, and, as Sylvia leads down the middle with Grimes, she turns her flushed, sparkling face over her shoulder to say to Mrs. Cardigan :

"Isn't this ever so much better than the Springs?"

"It is a most brilliant ball, especially in the matter of costumes," the widow laughs back.

The brilliant ball closes about midnight. Compassion for Tip the fiddler, who assures us, however, that he is not tired, and for

Aunt Markham, whose sleeping-apartment adjoins the ballroom, together with a recollection of our travel during the past day, and early rising on the morrow, join to make us dismiss our new acquaintances to their camp. The moon has risen, and is shining brightly when we go to the piazza to see them off with many jests, farewell words, and good wishes.

This is not the last of them, however. An hour later we are roused from sleep by voices under our window suddenly bursting into song.

"Those scamps!" says Sylvia. "They threatened me with a serenade, and I said to them, 'Don't,' but you see they have come."

"One or two of them have good voices," says Mrs. Cardigan. "Listen! Really this is worth being waked for."

We agree that it is. The silver moonlight streams, the dark foliage sways gently, the merry voices rise in chorus. Song follows song—serenades, woodland ballads, hunting-glees. Several of the voices are excellent. It is a melodious tenor which presently sings that exquisite serenade:

"I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me, who knows how,
To thy chamber-window, sweet."



The Reel.

son of moderate stature would require a ladder to mount to it.

This is a trifle, however. On waxed floors and under blazing chandeliers I have yet to see a tenth part of the merriment, the absolute enjoyment, which makes this evening delightful. How gayly the laughter rings, how bright the eyes, how light the steps!

"Oh, if in after-life we could but gather
The very refuse of our youthful hours!"

"If it is half as pleasant for them to sing as for us to listen, how they must be enjoying themselves!" says Mrs. Cardigan. "What is that? 'Good - by, Sweetheart, Good - by!' They mean to close now."

"I must throw them a flower when they finish," says Sylvia, stealing to the window.

The flower is thrown, "Good-nights" are uttered, then steps and voices recede; the last we hear some one is singing, as they tramp down the road:

"'Tis but a little faded flower,
But, oh, how dear to me!
It brings me back one joyous hour—"

The words grow inaudible, the laughter dies away, our pleasant friends of a day are gone!

CHAPTER XIV.

"How fair this mountain's purple bust,
Alone in high and glimmering air,
And see yon village spires upthrust,
And yon dark plain—how fair!

"How fair this lone and lovely scene,
And yonder dropping fiery ball,
And eve's sweet spirit, which steals unseen
With darkness over all!"

THE early sunshine is lying warm and bright over the valley, and the far mountains stand fully revealed in soft blue loveliness beneath the radiant sky, when we bid farewell next morning to the pastoral landscape which has charmed us so much, and continue our journey.

Not more than a quarter of a mile from the house where we spent the night, the road turns abruptly, and leaving the valley enters among the hills, winding along a mountain-side and overlooking a deep gorge through which the Little River comes in white sheets and hurrying rapids. Great heights, clothed with verdure, dominate the pass, so that our way lies in shadow, only pierced here and there by rays of sunlight that fill the dusky greenness with a shimmer of gold. The road is a mere shelf—narrow as that along the French Broad, and more dangerous, inasmuch as one is at least on a level with the latter river, while here one has the pleasing prospect (in case necessity requires one to pass another vehicle) of being pushed over a precipice varying in depth from fifty to a hundred feet, to the rocks and rushing water below.

We do not go over, however, despite an encounter with two wagons at one of the narrowest points of the road. It is a matter requiring much time and ingenuity to engineer past them without an accident, but Eric and John—having relieved themselves of their human freight as a matter of precaution—manage to do so successfully.

The morning is all before us in which to reach Buck Forest, so we take advantage of the pause to clamber over rocks and through laurel-bushes, to a point from which we command a view of the river as it sweeps down at a declination of forty or fifty degrees, and—

" . . . like a steed in frantic fit
That flings the froth from curb and bit,"

whirls in eddy foam and spray over, under, and around the massive rocks that bar its course.

"This stream has a troubled time of it altogether," says Charley, who has gone out farther than any one else dares venture, and deaf to our remonstrances stands on a narrow, shelving ledge overlooking the surging current. "From its fountain, until it reaches the valley which we have just left—where the French Broad immediately swallows it up—it flows over a bed of rock, and is broken into endless falls and rapids—several of them exceedingly grand."

"It strikes me that the entire country seems to have a rock foundation," says Mr. Lanier. "Look at that mountain over there! It is solid rock, with a few feet of soil on the surface."

"The effect is picturesque in the extreme," says Mrs. Cardigan, regarding the mountain in question with approbation.

Certainly nothing can be finer than this splendid height, as it rises above the stream for at least a thousand feet, its great side covered with tangled greenness save in places where the rock is uncovered and stands forth boldly in gray cliffs, while, by throwing our heads far back as we look upward, we can see the crest outlined against the intense silvery-blue sky.

After leaving this point we travel for two or three miles at a very leisurely rate—spending more time out of the carriages than in them, since the beautiful road tempts one to constant lingering. The flashing water is before our eyes, its musical tumult in our ears; the rocks, the foliage-clad hills, the

beauty of the golden day, all combine to fill us with what Sylvia calls "the Arcadian spirit," which may perhaps be defined as an inclination to loiter whenever loitering is practicable.

We have entered, too, a fairy-land of flowers, and our hands are full of them as we stroll along. On the hillsides, in the deep, ferny glens, by the plashing streams, and among the mossy stones, grow all manner of blossoms in profusion—large, purple passion-flowers, royal tiger-lilies of different shades, the lovely orchis, which is locally known as "the highland plume," in tints ranging from orange to pale salmon and white, delicate wild-azalias, starry flowers which no one is botanist enough to be able to name, and trailing sprays of graceful creepers. Wild-grasses abound, and we deck our hats with them.

"Here is the fly-trap," says Charley, coming up with a peculiar-looking plant—a green cup, with a top which closes over any unlucky insect that may chance to venture within.

At this rate of progress, it is not remarkable that the day is nearly half gone by the time we reach Buck Forest—which proves to be a large two-story building, with a long piazza in front, shade-trees drooping all around, a mountain of brown rock near by, on which verdure only appears in tufts, and depths of forest greenery in every direction.

"What an appropriately-named place!" says Sylvia. "And this is where you and Charley are so fond of coming, Eric? Pray what do you do after you get here?"

"Do?" repeats Eric. "Why, hunt, ride, fish, make excursions of all kinds; Buck Forest is the last place in the world where one can possibly feel the want of something to do. It has an owner who is an ideal mountain host, and for company one is generally sure of finding the best of good fellows."

"Like those good fellows who sang 'Good-by, Sweetheart,' last night?" she asks, laughing. "If so, I shall be delighted to meet them."

"It is mostly a resort for hunters and sportsmen," says Charley. "I don't think ladies, as a rule, like it much—at least, they like it after a fashion, no one could help doing *that*; but they find it dull. Poor souls! one can't blame them. There are no min-

eral waters to drink, no grounds to lounge over, no bowling-alley to flirt in, no ballroom—"

"That will do, Mr. Kenyon!" cries Mrs. Cardigan. "Stop before you become hopelessly commonplace, for you know you were going to say 'no ballroom in which to display fine toilets.' Now, I insist that one can enjoy a ball without fine toilets—as we proved last night—and I am sure we shall all be charmed with Buck Forest."

"Here is a man whose fault it certainly will not be if you are not," says Eric, as we draw up before the door, and the ideal mountain host comes down the piazza-steps to meet us. The greetings between Eric, Charley, and himself, are warm in the extreme—old friends and comrades have they been for many a day—and when he is presented to us we, too, feel the frank friendliness of his manner. As we ascend to the piazza, Aunt Markham looks round graciously, and remarks that it seems to be a very pleasant place.

"It is not pleasant—it is delightful!" says Sylvia, whose partialities and prejudices are both conceived with lightning-like rapidity. "This is that 'lodge in some vast wilderness' for which we have been sighing so long. Look at the 'boundless continuity of shade'—and oh, what splendid antlers!"

The antlers to which this exclamation refers hang against the wall of the house, together with several hunting-horns of graceful shape, while long-eared, soft-eyed hounds are lying about, and everything is suggestive of woodland sports.

Presently Eric comes up enthusiastic.

"They killed one deer yesterday afternoon, and brought in another only an hour before we reached here," he says. "If anybody wants better hunting than that, I don't know where he can go to find it."

"If they continue on at that rate, I shouldn't think it would take long to thin out the game," says Mr. Lanier.

"Who are 'they?'" inquires Sylvia. "Our host does not talk of himself in the plural, does he?"

The motive of this question is so transparent that we all laugh. Sylvia is not in the least disconcerted; she makes no secret of the fact that she likes to form new and pleasant acquaintances.

"They," replies Eric, "are a party of gentlemen—one of whom is an old comrade

of mine. Yonder he comes now.—Brandon, how are you?"

The gentleman thus addressed has just emerged from the house; he starts at sight of Eric, and they shake hands heartily. Inquiries and greetings are exchanged. We catch the words "fine buck"—"shot him at about forty yards"—"first-rate shot"—"made by Mr. Charlton."

"I wonder if he is speaking of Geoffrey Charlton?" says Mrs. Cardigan. "I know him. He is a writer—a journalist, or something of that kind."

"Such people are not generally agreeable," says Sylvia—who, a month ago, was inclined to exalt "culture" above anything else, and esteemed "such people" to be the cream of earth's population. "They are too much inclined to think that nothing is worth knowing which is not to be found in books."

"I am afraid that if you remain in this country much longer *you* will think that nothing is worth knowing which is not learned in the woods," observed Mr. Lanier, with rather a forced smile.

"There are worse schools of manhood," says Charley, taking down one of the horns, and winding such a blast that the hounds all start up with an enraptured howl.

Just then one or two ladies appear, and the sight of their fresh toilets moves us to a sudden recollection of our travel-stained condition—for rocks and bushes are more picturesque than beneficial in their effect upon costumes. We retire to our rooms, and, by the time we have made some necessary changes of dress, the dinner-bell rings.

We should be very ungrateful if we failed to record the fact that the fare at Buck Forest is admirable, considering that we do the fullest possible justice to it. Sylvia breathes a sigh of satisfaction when she receives on her plate a slice of tender, well-dressed venison.

"At last!" she says.

"At last you have reached the *Ultima Thule* of your dreams," says Charley. "Shall I go out after dinner and shoot some pheasants for your supper? They abound here."

"No," she answers, "don't overwhelm me! Venison is enough for the first day—and such venison! To-morrow you may shoot the pheasants."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cardigan has found that Mr. Charlton is her acquaintance, and she is talking to him across the table.

"What a remote corner of creation this is in which to meet you!" she says. "Pray, how do you come to be here?"

Mr. Charlton shrugs his shoulders.

"I hardly know," he answers. "Chance, good-fortune, anything you like, wafted me here. I have been in Transylvania for a month."

"And like it, of course; else you would not have staid so long."

"Could any one fail to like it?"

"Well, yes—I am sure some people would not like it," she replies. "But not people of good taste, like you and me. Are you much of a hunter?"

"Not very much, but I had the good luck to kill a deer this morning."

"So I have heard—a fine buck, they say. May I ask a favor for old acquaintance' sake? Will you give me the antlers?"

Certainly, Mrs. Cardigan will never need anything through lack of asking for it. A cardinal principle of her philosophy appears to be, 'When you want a thing, say so.' In the present instance she makes her request, as usual, with an engaging smile and perfect *sang-froid*. Mr. Charlton on his part looks a trifle embarrassed.

"I should be very happy to grant you that, or any other favor," he says, "but I have already promised the antlers—though I had little hope, when I made the promise, of securing such spoils—to a lady whom I left at Caesar's Head."

"Oh, indeed!" she says, opening her eyes a little. "In that case of course I can't expect you to give them to *me*. But perhaps some one else will gratify me.—Mr. Markham—Mr. Lanier—who will promise me the antlers of the first stag killed?"

"We all promise them," says Eric, gallantly, "provided that we are lucky enough to kill another stag."

"I don't promise," says Charley, in an undertone.—"Shouldn't you like them?" he adds, turning to Sylvia.

"Very much—if they were offered to me," she answers, in the same tone; "but I don't think anything has much value that one is forced to ask for."

"Some things have," says the young man, quickly.

The place not being auspicious for a sentimental conversation, Sylvia takes no notice of this remark.

"But if anybody wanted to make me perfectly happy," she proceeds, "he would get me a small *live* fawn."

Fortunately for Charley, before he can pledge himself to anything rash, Aunt Markham makes the move for leaving table, and we follow. The piazza at Buck Forest, even more than at most places of the kind, is reception-room, parlor, card-room, gathering-place in chief; so we adjourn thither, and discuss our plans for the afternoon

"Suppose we devote it to rest?" I venture to suggest; but the idea is contemptuously scouted.

"Who needs rest?" says Sylvia. "I don't. If anybody will take me anywhere, I'll go gladly."

"Should you like to join a deer-hunt?" asks Eric. "Brandon thinks that if we take the dogs through the Rich Mountain drive, we may perhaps start a deer. At all events it is worth trying; and the view from the mountain is worth seeing. I know of no view so fine to be obtained with so little trouble."

"O Eric, *how* charming you are!" cries Sylvia, starting up. "Of course I will go."

"And I," says Mrs. Cardigan, almost as eagerly.

I find myself too strongly tempted by this prospect to carry out my own proposal of rest; so it follows that in the course of the next hour we start—a train of merry equestrians, with horns and guns and dogs.

"This is what I have dreamed of!" says Sylvia, with ecstasy.

"I hope you dreamed of starting a deer," says Charley.

"I hope she didn't," says Rupert. "Dreams always go by contraries."

Rich Mountain is three miles distant from Buck Forest, and the ride thither is like enchantment on this September after-

noon. The beauty of the day is without flaw, and the green depths of the forest into which we plunge are filled with a streaming glory of amber sunshine. Mr. Brandon and Eric, who lead the cavalcade, do not follow any road nor even a bridle-path. Straight through "the coverts of the deer," in other words, through the most thickly-timbered woods and the densest *chaparrals* of laurels and ivy, they go, and we straggle after them. There is not very much conversation. In



"A train of merry equestrians."

the first place, we are too scattered, for every rider chooses his own way; and, in the second place, the attention of our escorts is altogether concentrated upon the dogs. Will they "jump" a deer? That is the momentous question which fills their minds. The dogs themselves seem anxious enough to do so. They run to and fro with their noses to the ground, and obediently answer any horn or whoop which may be sounded; but no deer is unfortunate enough to be "jumped."

Meanwhile we are mounting higher and

higher in gradual but certain ascent. So rich is the soil beneath our horses' feet, so luxuriant the growth upon it, that we appreciate the fact that the mountain deserves its name, and we are not surprised to hear that it is a favorite cattle-range.

"There are hundreds of cattle on it," says Mr. Brandon. "You'll see any number of them when you reach the summit."

Presently we strike into a path which leads directly upward, winding through the beautiful world of green and gold. Suddenly we look round with amazement. What is this? Here on this mountain-side, in the midst of the fair, wild forest, we find ourselves in a castle-court—a quadrangular space, inclosed by great rocks of square, massive shape, and soft, gray tint.

"The Castle Rock," says Charley, pointing to the largest of these. "Fine, isn't it?"

It is very fine, and fully as large as a castle, which it strongly resembles. The grandeur of these fragments is heightened by their position and isolation. No other rocks are anywhere near, but so firmly fixed are they that one feels that they may have stood since the beginning of time.

"When we come back from the summit," says our host, taking a coil of rope from the front of his saddle and throwing it on the ground, "we can climb to the top of that rock, if you like."

"I don't clearly see how we can," says Mrs. Cardigan, who has no relish for adventures in which her neck is absolutely put in jeopardy.

"Oh, it's easy enough," says Charley, carelessly. "You mount on the other side with a rope."

"So that is what the rope is for," says Sylvia. "I have been wondering who was to be hanged."

From this point the ascent is very steep to the top of the knob which crowns the mountain. Nevertheless, we ride to the summit, then dismount, the horses are fastened, and we go to the verge of a rocky precipice, from which, "broad, extended far beneath," lies the view.

It is lovely in the extreme, and more extensive than can be realized at first. Indeed, no view which is worth anything *can* be grasped at once—its beauties must grow upon one, its immensity be appreciated by degrees, its charm sink gradually on the

spirit. For this reason one cannot too strongly deprecate such hasty visits to the summits of mountains as most people make, such rapid glances at scenes that one might spend hours—nay, even days—in studying.

From the bold crest of Rich Mountain—which is sufficiently elevated for a commanding view, yet not high enough to dwarf all beneath it into insignificance, as one must confess that the Black Mountain does—we overlook all the country south and southeast of it. At our feet lies that upper valley of the French Broad, which is the pride of Transylvania, while a little beyond, embosomed in green hills, the pretty village of Brevard catches the sunlight on its white houses. Around the horizon one line of blue, waving mountains succeeds another, until the farthest can scarcely be distinguished from clouds as they stand against the sky.

"Yonder is the great range of the Balsam," says Eric, pointing to the most prominent chain, the dark-blue masses of which overlook the wooded hills and smiling plains of the foreground. "Behind are the Cullowhee and the Nantahala. Here on the left is the Blue Ridge, while far and faint in the west are the peaks of the Smoky, with Georgia and Tennessee behind."

How infinitely beautiful all is! The tints on the vast array of mountains run through the gamut of colors, from rich purple to palest blue. The atmosphere is so clear that beyond the gaps of the Blue Ridge we see the misty plain of South Carolina stretching away southward. The jewel-like day reveals the scene in all its loveliness, yet the picture does not lack the softness that only shadows give. Far off in the west, among the rugged heights and dark passes of the Balsam, a cloud is discharging itself between us and the sun, while the rays of the latter, striking through the falling rain, light it up to indescribable glory. Over Pisgah and the mountains that divide Transylvania from Haywood, great masses of soft white clouds are lying, wrapping here and there the summits of the peaks, and a silver haze—half cloud, half mist—drapes the outlines of the distant Smoky.

"If you were here in the morning you would see the sun strike the shining side of the Looking-Glass Mountain yonder," says Mr. Brandon, pointing over Brevard.

"I wish we *could* see the sun rise!" says

Sylvia. "Can't we stay all night, as we did on the Black Mountain?"

"Would you like to bivouac in the open air?" asks Eric.

"I should not object," she answers; "but is there no way of getting *into* the Castle Rock?"

"I am sorry to say that we have not yet discovered the way," Mr. Brandon replies.

"Perhaps if we struck the side of it and said '*Open sesame*,' a door might swing back," says Mrs. Cardigan.

"But the people who went into such places under such circumstances were generally unable to come out again, weren't they?" asks Mr. Lanier. "That would not be encouraging."

"We'll go and try the experiment at any rate," says Charley. "If we mean to ascend the rock, we have no time to spare. The sun will set in half an hour—or less time."

"And there is going to be a gorgeous sunset," says Sylvia, looking at the marshaling clouds. "Let us stay for it!"

"Just as you like," says Charley, "the sunset or the rock. Choose between them—for you can't have both."

"Put it to the vote," cries Rupert.

It is put to the vote, and the rock carries the day. Only Mr. Lanier votes for the sunset—partly from indolence, partly to please Sylvia. That young lady rewards him by saying that after all she prefers the ascent of the rock. "That will be adventurous," she remarks. "This is only beautiful."

So we go down to where the rocks stand in their picturesque massiveness, with plummy ferns covering the ground at their base, and a world of graceful foliage drooping around. Having entered the quadrangle, we dismount again, and are led to the western side of the Castle Rock. Here we pause and gaze at the height which we are expected to scale.

Eighty-five feet above, the great mass towers sheer and bold, with broken escarpments here and there, and, higher up, a shelving side, scarcely affording foothold, one would say, for anything less active than a squirrel. We look at each other half-laughing, half-dismayed.

"How are we ever to get to the top of that?" says Mrs. Cardigan.

"Eric is there," cries Sylvia. "See! he is fastening the rope to a tree that grows

out of the top of the rock. If he went up without a rope, surely we can climb *with* one."

"It is a great risk," says Mr. Lanier, who has plainly no fancy for such a feat. "I beg you, ladies, not to attempt the ascent. It is rash—it is—"

"Hallo!"—Charley's smiling face looks at us over a ledge of the rock—"we are ready. Who comes first?"

"I do!" answers Sylvia. She springs forward, unheeding the fact that Mr. Lanier grows almost pale in his eagerness to detain her. He absolutely catches her arm.

"Pray listen to me," he says. "Pray don't go. If you were to fall, nothing could save you from a severe injury. Kenyon is not to be relied on. He risked your life once before—"

She shakes off his hand impatiently. There is a flash in her eye as she glances at him.

"Charley thinks more of my life than he does of his own," she says. "He *never* risked it. I never was in danger—not for a moment—when I was with him. Let me go!"

He lets her go. As he falls back, biting his lip, I see a quick flush rise to Mrs. Cardigan's dark cheek. Perhaps at that moment it occurs to her that many a heart—or at least many a fancy—is caught in the rebound, and that pique is the surest cure for a hopeless passion. She utters a low laugh as the discomfited gentleman returns to her side.

"I see you don't appreciate," she says, "the *tendresse* that exists between Miss Norwood and Mr. Kenyon—and that the best way to make a woman do a thing is to beg her *not* to do it."

"Is it the best way with you?" he asks, turning with a glow—of resentment against Sylvia—in his eyes.

"Not particularly so," she answers, lightly, "though of course I share somewhat the infirmities of my sex."

"And do you intend to climb that rock?" he says. "I am sure you will find it not only dangerous but very disagreeable."

"I don't think I shall climb it," she replies, slowly. As she speaks, I see plainly that she longs to follow Sylvia, who is now standing by Charley's side, far above our heads, while Eric instructs her how to hold

the rope when he assists her up the sloping rock which still rises above them.

This operation is a difficult and not very graceful one. Sylvia is escorted safely to the top, and then my turn comes—for Mrs.

he promised, however. I, too, am conveyed safely to the top, and deposited in a breathless condition on a rock which it is a comfort to feel is *flat*.

There is some further—but not very difficult—climbing, and then we stand on the summit of the Castle, with the mountain shelving downward, a sea of verdure at our feet, and an extensive view toward the east, which would be beautiful in a clearer light. Now the shades of evening have fallen, and the outlines of the distant scene have grown indistinct. Nevertheless our guide points at once northeast.

"There is the Black!" he says.

Truly enough, there it is—the outlines of its mighty shoulders clearly defined, though a cloud, as usual, wraps its head.

"That is the same cloud we left there," says Charley, who has by this time followed us.

Rupert—who accompanied Eric in the first ascent—was already on the top when we reached it; the rest of the party now appear, with the ex-

ception of Mrs. Cardigan and Mr. Lanier, who remain below. Over the peak behind us brilliant masses of sunset clouds float—clouds which make Sylvia almost regret that she did not remain for this sweet vesper of the dying day—while the soft, purple veil of twilight covers like a mantle the wide expanse which we overlook.

"Oh," says Sylvia, turning to Charley, "this is surely better than if you had 'jumped' a deer!"



"Let me go!"

Cardigan declines to venture. I am hoisted up to Charley—words fail me to speak of the height of the steps which one is told to take, and the manner in which the muscles of one's arms are tested, in this kind of climbing—then Eric receives me in charge.

"I have only one thing to say," he remarks, before we start, "don't be afraid! If you were to faint, I'd carry you safely to the top."

This is reassuring—as is also the firm grasp on my arm, the steady hand controlling the rope. But rocks—especially when they are shelving—are very slippery, and I have a slightly giddy feeling in attempting to crawl like a spider across the side of one, with only a rope to cling to if my foot should slip. Eric does all, and more than all, that

CHAPTER XV.

"Love to the mountains led his sheep,
Once on a summer day,
Into a valley green and deep,
Under rock-ramparts gray;

"Sat on a stone where the waters run
Rippling the hours away,
Touched his lute in the light of the sun—
That was a summer day."

WE return to the hotel through the soft, starlit dusk, and find that the company has changed during our absence. Several newcomers have arrived, Mr. Charlton has taken his departure.

"He has an attraction at Cæsar's Head," observes Mr. Brandon, when Mrs. Cardigan remarks this fact. "Miss Tyrrell is there—you know her, Markham. She is an uncommonly nice girl."

"Who is she?" asks Mrs. Cardigan, with the interest that some women are quick to feel in any other woman who is reputed attractive.

While this question is answered, and Eric is sounding the praises of Miss Tyrrell and her family, the supper-bell rings, and we go in with appetites sharpened by the fresh mountain-air.

After supper the piazza is not less attractive than by day, and, with shawls wrapped around us, we adjourn thither. The stars are brilliant, and against the steel-blue sky the dark crest of Rich Mountain is distinctly outlined.

"Don't you wish we were there *now*?" asks Sylvia, wistfully. "How silent and awesome it must be!"

"Some of us don't fancy awesome things," says Charley, who is seated on the steps smoking. "I prefer my present quarters very much."

"You have no poetry in your soul," says the young lady. "Mr. Lanier, now—I am sure *he* would like to be there."

She glances round as she speaks, but there is no Mr. Lanier to answer the jesting words. His place is vacant, so likewise is that of Mrs. Cardigan. At the far end of the piazza two dark figures in close proximity are dimly visible—star-gazing, no doubt. Eric laughs.

"'Now, gallant Saxon, hold thine own!'"

he says to Sylvia. "There seem suspicious signs of treachery and desertion in the camp."

"Two things which one should never condescend to notice," she answers, carelessly.

Notwithstanding this sentiment she expresses herself with less reserve on the subject when we are alone for the night.

"Have you ever seen anything to equal the manner in which Mrs. Cardigan is trying to flirt with Ralph Lanier?" she asks. "She has given up Eric as a hopeless subject, and turned her batteries on the other."

"It is certainly a bold invasion of the rights of property," I say, "considering what an admirer of yours he has been for some time. No woman with self-respect would act in such a manner—but Mrs. Cardigan has little of that quality. Nevertheless, you have yourself, not her attractions, to blame for Mr. Lanier's desertion."

"Perhaps I have," she says, carelessly. "I know that I could bring him back by a word—but I don't think I shall speak the word. I have lost any faint liking I may ever have had for him, and as for making a cold-blooded marriage of convenience—I could not do *that* if my life depended on it."

"Take care!" I say, warningly. "I grant that Mr. Lanier does not appear to great advantage on a tour of this description—he is, in fact, altogether out of his element. But you don't expect to spend your life in Arcadia, and when you go back to the world, where fine dresses, fine jewels, fine equipages, will assume again their place of first importance, you may be sorry for having discarded a man who represents all these things."

"What a feminine Mephistopheles you are!" she says. Then she throws back the cloud of dark hair which she is combing, and looks at me with her shining eyes. "Perhaps it is a good thing to wander in Arcadia for a little while and realize that life may be happy, and healthy, and free, without any of those things," she says. "It is something I have needed to learn."

"Which means, I suppose, that you are going to marry Charley, and try living in Arcadia for good. You are a simpleton—but never mind! Stop talking, and go to bed."

"You are mistaken," she says, with dignity. "Because I don't choose to marry one man is no reason for supposing I mean to marry another."

"You are an arrant flirt, and a shameful impostor!" I say; and then I go to bed myself.

The next morning at breakfast we find that there are grave signs of desertion of another kind. The gentlemen in a body are missing—having taken an early departure for a deer-hunt. Sylvia is much injured and incensed by this proceeding.

"I should not mind it so much if they had not known that I wanted to go!" she says. "It is mean and shameful of them to act in so—so underhand a manner. They must have *stolen* away; they could not even have sounded a horn, or it would have waked me."

"You are mistaken about that," says one of the ladies. "There was a great deal of noise, blowing of horns and barking of dogs. You must have slept soundly not to have heard it."

"How can anybody help sleeping soundly in this climate?" asks Sylvia, aggrieved.

It is the middle of the day before the hunters return, empty-handed—having failed altogether to start a deer, which fact is full of balm to Sylvia's feelings. She is standing on the piazza with a novel (to which she has been forced to betake herself) in her hand, when they ride up, and she proceeds at once to empty the vials of her indignation upon their heads.

"Are you not ashamed of yourselves?" she says. "If you had told me that you did not want me, of course I should not have pressed my society upon you; but to go off in this manner, and leave me behind *without a word*—that I call mean in the extreme."

"Look here!" says Eric, "you surely did not expect to be taken on a regular deer-hunt? Why, you would find nothing entertaining in it, and you would be amazingly in the way besides."

This remark wounds Sylvia deeply. In the way! She is evidently unable to imagine that such a thing could be within the remotest range of possibility. A flush comes over her face, she draws herself up.

"In that case, I have nothing more to say," she remarks, and moves away like a queen.

With a laugh, Charley springs from his horse and follows her. She has retreated to the end of the piazza, where Mrs. Cardigan and Mr. Lanier conducted their flirtation the night before, and opened her novel with the

air of one intensely absorbed—an air, however, which does not impose upon the young man, who comes up smiling.

"Don't be vexed, Sylvia!" he says. "Eric is a sort of mis—what do you call it?—woman-hater, you know. I should not have found you in the way at all; but it would have been a pity to disturb you so early in the morning. Why, we started at daylight, and you know you are not partial to rising with the lark—unless it is for a horseback flirtation."

Sylvia's eyes are fastened on the pages of "The Wooing O't." She takes no notice of the apologies, or of the last assertion, and Charley has an excellent opportunity to observe the length and color of her lashes, as they droop steadily downward. He laughs again.

"How shall we pacify you?" he says. "Shall we take you to Rich Mountain again? By-the-by, did you leave anything on the top of Castle Rock yesterday evening?"

"I lost a piece of blue ribbon from my hair," she answers, glancing up now—and then she sees the identical knot of ribbon pinned on the front of his coat. "So you have found it!" she says, holding out her hand.

But he draws back.

"Treasure—trove!" he says. "I was passing the rock with Lanier, and we both observed it lying on the side. I suggested that whoever could get it should have it, but he declined to climb, so I risked my neck alone—and here it is. You could not think of asking me to give it up after that!"

"It is not of much importance," she says, carelessly, "but I don't see what you want with it."

"Ah! don't you? Well, Lanier does. I doubt if there is a more angry or jealous man on the face of the globe just now. This is my order of merit, and—and blue is the color of hope, isn't it?"

'Give me but what this ribbon bound,
Take all the rest the sun goes round!'

"If you think," says Sylvia, majestically, "that by climbing—no great feat, I am sure!—the Castle Rock for a piece of blue ribbon, and by paying foolish compliments, you can make me forget my just grievance, you are very much mistaken!"

And then, with a crushing air, she returns to "The Wooing O't."

"The woman who would not be flattered when a man climbs a rock for a ribbon which she dropped, simply for the pleasure of possessing it, and of aggravating another man, has—has no poetry in her soul!" says Charley. "What *will* make you forget your grievance, then? Should you like to go to the falls behind Cedar Mountain this afternoon?"

She looks up laughing—finding it impossible to keep her face in order any longer.

perfectly happy if she could induce Sylvia to show any signs of pique. But the latter is unaffectedly indifferent—culpably indifferent, Aunt Markham thinks—to Mr. Lanier's defection, and her eyes shine as brightly, her sweet laugh rings as gayly, as if his devotion was all that the heart of woman could desire.

With affairs in this condition we start—a long cavalcade—toward the falls. Aunt Markham, seated in state on the piazza, gives us her blessing, but declines to accompany us.

"Eric," she says, "pray take care that nobody is shot, or drowned, or killed in any other way."

The allusion to shooting is on account of the guns which several of the gentlemen carry, for the dogs are taken along, and there are faint hopes entertained of "jumping" a deer. Eric, who is accustomed to being addressed as a kind of general policeman, answers with commendable gravity that he will endeavor to see that no accident of the kind occurs, and then we ride off.

The sun is shining brightly, but there are one or two ominous-looking clouds on the mountains, which make several persons proph-



"One does not come to Arcadia to stay in the house and read novels."

"You know I should!" she says. "It is doubly mean of you to treat me in this way, because one does not come to Arcadia to stay in the house and read novels."

So it is arranged, and, after an early dinner, we start to the falls of the Little River, which are chief among the sights around Buck Forest. Charley still wears his "order of merit" conspicuously on his coat, and Mr. Lanier devotes the chief of his attentions to Mrs. Cardigan. That lady is in the highest possible spirits, and I think would be

easy rain. We heed the prophecies as little as possible. When people have been drenched in every conceivable manner, and at every conceivable time, it would be remarkable if they did not become indifferent to the weather. Our way lies over Cedar Mountain—not because it is the way to reach the falls, but rather because it is *not*.

"Most people follow the road," says Charley, "but that is stupid. Come this way and we shall have the view besides."

Nobody demurs—not even Mr. Lanier.

He seems to have resigned himself to anything that may befall him while he is with a party who value their necks so lightly. Up Cedar Mountain, therefore, we go. This imposing hill of brown rock is the first thing which attracts the attention of the traveler who arrives at Buck Forest. It rises boldly in the foreground, its sides only sparsely covered with foliage, and in many places altogether bare. As are the sides, so is the summit. Here and there sufficient soil has collected to nourish a forest-growth; but for the most part one rides or walks over immense sheets of rock, diversified by beds of the richest moss, and tiny pools of water. The height of the eminence is not very great, but it commands a good view of the surrounding country, and of the mountains that stretch in azure fairness across the far horizon. This afternoon, however, the prospect is not seen to advantage—there are too many low-lying clouds in all directions, and over Rich Mountain one dark mass is rising—"boiling up" is the expressive provincial phrase—which looks as if it meant mischief.

"There may be a storm before long," says Eric. "Shall we go back and defer seeing the falls until to-morrow?"

"Go back because there is a dark cloud three or four miles away?" says Sylvia. "What an idea! No; let us go on."

"Is that the vote of the party?" he asks, looking round.

Yes, it is the vote of the party; the feminine part of which is strongly inclined to suspect the other part of wanting to secure another uninterrupted hunt.

"If the storm comes up," says Charley, "we can find a refuge at the Bridal-Veil Fall."

"What an odd place to find a refuge!" says Mrs. Cardigan. "How can a fall shelter us—unless it be on the homœopathic principle of like curing like?"

"You'll see when we get there how it can shelter us," says Mr. Brandon, winding a blast on his horn.

Having ascended the mountain on one side, we go down on the other, leaving the sheets of rock behind, and plunging into the depths of a forest without road or path. We are struggling through a laurel *chaparral* in single file, and I am wondering if I shall emerge without having suffered the loss of any of my raiment, or without being pulled

from my horse, when a vivid flash of lightning suddenly blazes around us, and a rattling peal of thunder sounds overhead.

We glance up in dismay. That the sun has been for some little time obscured we are all aware, but the suddenness with which the cloud has come over astonishes even those who are best acquainted with mountain-storms.

"I did not expect it so soon," says Mr. Brandon. "We must run for it, or we shall be drenched to the skin."

"Run! where?" asks Mr. Lanier, blankly.

"To the fall!" answers Eric, galloping ahead.

There is no time for question. Another vivid flash, another volleying peal, show us the necessity of following as rapidly as possible. Away we go, a string of racing equestrians, presenting altogether so ludicrous an appearance that I find myself shaking with laughter as I bring up the rear. It is a breathless race, under drooping boughs, through dense thickets, over fallen trees, down declivities where a stumble would send horse and rider rolling head-foremost. Presently we dash into something bearing a faint resemblance to a road, and, just as the first heavy drops of rain begin to fall, come in sight of a white sheet of water rushing swiftly down an inclined plane of rock, falling abruptly in a beautiful cascade, and then shooting down another rocky slope. Here our escorts draw up their panting horses.

"Just in time!" says Charley, as he lifts Sylvia from her saddle.

The rest of us are deposited on the ground, the horses are fastened, and then, as the rain begins to pour fast and furious, we are hurried along a winding descent over and under rocks, until some one says, "Stoop!" and we find ourselves beneath a great shelving rock on a level with the lower river-bed.

"Why, this is like the Black Mountain cave!" exclaims Sylvia, "only five times as large."

"It is not near so high in the roof," says Rupert, who has given his tall head a severe thump.

It is certainly low of roof and damp of floor, this house of Nature's providing; but, despite these drawbacks, it is as excellent a shelter from storm as the heart of wayfarer could desire. Over part of the ledge which forms the cave the stream pours

in the perpendicular fall already mentioned, then the rock sweeps round parallel to the bed of the river, and under this we have taken refuge. The bottom is covered with large fragments of stone that have fallen from above, and on these we perch, taking care to keep our feet from the water which is everywhere. Meanwhile, the rain is pouring in white torrents, the lightning is flashing, and above the tumult of the fall we hear the thunder rolling and rattling overhead.

"Is not this delightful?" cries Sylvia, appealing to the company. "Would you miss it for anything?"

"I should like exceedingly to miss it," replies Mrs. Cardigan, holding up her dress, and looking thoroughly out of humor. "I can see nothing delightful in sitting here, for who can say how long."

"Not for very long," says Eric. "The storm is too violent to last. It will be fair in an hour."

"An hour is a considerable time to spend in this manner," says Mr. Lanier, dusting his fingers, which show signs of contact with the rocks.

"It is a desirable thing to be a philosopher," says Charley, seating himself on a pile of stones, and regarding the falling rain with an expression of complacency. "I am a philosopher. It is a matter of small moment to me how long the rain lasts. I am ready to sit here till dark, or to ride home through it. Meanwhile, can't we have a game of whist?"

This proposal is received with favor, but, since nobody has thought of bringing a pack of cards, falls to the ground. There is nothing to be done but to possess our souls in patience, to talk idly, to shiver slightly in the damp air, and wonder when the storm will end. As soon as it abates, Charley and Mr. Brandon go out on a ledge by the side of the river to take an observation of the sky. They return in a moist condition, and report another cloud coming over.

"At this rate," says Mrs. Cardigan, "when *shall* we get away?"

In a few moments the cloud comes over as prophesied, and the rain pours again in torrents. The stream begins to swell, as mountain-streams do in the shortest possible time; and we notice that the fall increases in volume.

"Perhaps we shall be overflowed," Rupert

cheerfully suggests. "That would be a jolly adventure."

The second storm is of short duration. Presently the rain ceases, and a flash of sunshine lights up leaping water, gray rocks, and green hillsides.

"How delicious!" says Sylvia. "What a glittering scene! Let us go out where we can see it."

So we go out from under the shadow of the rock, and look round on the radiant, dripping world, and up at the blue sky from which the clouds have parted and fled. On the opposite side of the stream Cedar Mountain rises, covered with a wealth of tangled verdure; in front of us the Bridal Veil sweeps down and pours in a sheet of white foam and spray to the solid rock on which we stand.

"If you like," says Charley, "you can go behind the fall. It will be rather wetter than usual after such a heavy rain; but it is the regulation thing to do."

"Will anybody tell me," says Mrs. Cardigan, "what was the good of keeping dry under the rock, if we are going behind the fall now to get wet?"

"You won't get wet—only a little damp," says Mr. Brandon.

"I don't think that I care to get a 'little damp,'" she answers. "Besides, I can see the fall very well from here."

"But you can't see the view from the other side," says Charley. Then he turns to Sylvia. "Will *you* go?" he asks.

"That is a question which may be defined as unnecessary," she answers, drawing her water-proof over her shoulders. "Lead on!"

So he leads and she follows, while Mr. Brandon, Rupert, and I, come next. It is a trying operation, this passing behind the falls. The space for passage is very narrow, the wet stones are exceedingly slippery, the rock above shelves in a manner which makes it necessary to bend nearly double, the tumult of the falling water is almost deafening, and the spray fairly blinding. We draw a breath of relief when we emerge on the other side.

It is beautiful enough over here, however, to repay us for the inconvenience of the passage. The river does not altogether cover its bed, and we walk along the inclined rock, with the current rushing swiftly by our side and the mountain rising sheer above, covered with rhododendron, and interspersed with tapering

juniper-trees and stately spruce-pines. The stream shoots rapidly down until it drops suddenly into the loveliest pool that ever charmed the eye of a painter. The pellucid water might serve as a bath for Diana; rocks draped with vines, and flowers, and shrubs, inclose it; graceful trees lean over the crystal depths. It is a spot fit for nymphs—or lovers.

Perhaps Charley thinks so, for he insists upon taking Sylvia to it, along a very slippery and perilous way. She does not refuse his assistance, as she has often refused Mr. Lanier's under similar circumstances. Clinging together, and laughing gayly as a pair of children, they clamber down to the side of the pool, and then she clasps her hands in an ecstasy of delight.

"How beautiful! Oh, how beautiful!" I hear her say. "Charley, I should like to stay here!"

"I am at your service," says Charley. "We'll tell the others to go back and leave us. I shall be glad of the opportunity to utter a seasonable word or two."

"In that case I don't think I care to stay," she answers. "A seasonable word is one of the most unseasonable things in the world."

"Yonder is some beautiful moss," observes Mr. Brandon to me. "I'll get it for you if you like."

I do like; and, while he and Rupert are scrambling up the hillside, I watch them, and catch such scraps of the conversation at the pool as the following:

Charley. "I've stood a great deal, but, by Jove! I think it is time for me to have a definite answer of some kind."

Sylvia. "Oh, dear me, Charley, what is the good of beginning like this! You promised faithfully not to worry any more until we got home."

Charley. "I promise such a thing as that, with Lanier at hand to make love to you all the time! I'll be hanged if I did!"

Sylvia. "That was my understanding—but it does not matter. I suppose I need not expect any peace at any time. Mr. Lanier has gone over to Mrs. Cardigan; I think that ought to set your mind at rest about *him*."

Charley. "Fiddlesticks for Mrs. Cardigan! Lanier cares no more for her than I do! Sylvia, long as I have known you, I don't quite know what to make of you yet. Sometimes I think you are a heartless flirt!"

Sylvia. "Thank you very much."

Charley. "Then again I feel inclined to trust you with—everything. Just now that inclination is particularly strong. If you hold out a sign of encouragement, I will indulge it with the greatest pleasure."

Sylvia. "But what is 'everything'? Such an indefinite offer is rather more alarming than gratifying. Don't tell me now, however. Let us go back, and some other time—"

Charley. "That is what you always say. 'Some other time,' but the time never comes, and I am half inclined to believe that it never *will* come. This time is as good as any other, and, if you care for me—"

Sylvia (coolly). "I never said that I did, other than 'as a younger brother,' as I heard a sentimental lady say the other day of the man with whom she was flirting."

I do not hear Charley's reply to this, for Mr. Brandon and Rupert return laden with mosses and ferns, over which we hold an animated discussion until a shout from the direction of the cave makes us turn, and we see three handkerchiefs waving a signal of recall. Then, like Lord Ullin in the ballad, we lift our voices and cry to Charley and Sylvia, "Come back! come back!"—a summons which one, at least, of them is ready enough to heed.

They come, and we walk on. I—who loiter behind my escort in order to be sure of finding safe footing on the treacherous rock—learn that their conversation has not waxed more amicable.

"I am tired of the subject!" I hear Sylvia say, petulantly, "and I will *not* be brow-beaten into giving an answer when I am not ready to do so. You must wait my time, or do without an answer at all."

Charley (whose long-suffering patience is plainly exhausted). "You mean that I am to be kept off and on until you are tired of amusing yourself, or until you decide to marry some rich prig like Lanier. Thanks exceedingly, but I don't fancy the *role*, and I am sure you could answer me now if you chose to do so. We've known each other long enough!"

Sylvia (with a sigh). "Too long for romance. There is no possibility of the illusion that ought to accompany the tender passion. Why, I know all your weak points as well as you know mine!"

Charley. "So much the better!—we'll

have less to learn after marriage. I don't believe in illusions—I can't see that they serve any good end. I had rather love one woman than a dozen angels. Now, Sylvia, just one word—"

Sylvia (impatiently). "I won't! I haven't any word to say—do let me alone."

Charley, (speaking with dark emphasis). "You had better tell me. I have made up my mind not to stand this state of affairs any longer. If the worst comes to the worst, I'll have it out with Lanier."

Sylvia (sarcastically). "Pray do! That would help matters so much!"

By the time the conversation has reached this point we gain the fall, and Mr. Brandon says:

"Be careful where you step, and follow me exactly."

I am careful, and follow him exactly—hence I emerge in safety on the farther side; but there are other members of the party not so fortunate. What evil spirit possesses Charley I do not know, but he certainly pauses midway in the passage and turns—thus forcing Sylvia, who is behind, to pause also. The torrent of water is pouring in a cataract of foam and spray before their eyes, its noise fills their ears. Yet the reckless young fellow absolutely seizes his companion's hand and holds it in a vice-like pressure.

"Now," he says, "you *shall* answer me! I'll not let you pass until you do. Is it yes or no?"

"Charley, how dare you!" cries Sylvia, amazed and indignant. "I—I *won't* be bullied in this manner! Let me pass."

"I'll let you pass the instant you say yes or no," replies Charley, inexorably; "not before on any account."

"No, then!" she cries, with all the emphasis of which she is capable under the cir-

cumstances, and, snatching her hand from his grasp, she endeavors to dart past him—but the stepping-stones are slippery and unstable. She loses her footing, and he has barely time to seize her as she sinks under the Bridal-Veil Fall.



"He has barely time to seize her as she sinks under the Bridal-Veil Fall."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Nature has known no change, felt no decay,
For untold ages in this ancient land;
Her dark woods wave, her rivers hold their way,
Majestic as when first from Nature's hand;
Down the dread depths, as in the dawn of time,
The raging cataracts their waters urge."

THERE is no danger in the matter only the discomfort of being thoroughly drenched and rendered almost senseless by the volume of pouring water. I do not hear the conversation—that is reported to me later—but I have a suspicion of what causes the delay, and I am not greatly surprised when Charley emerges from behind the fall, bearing Sylvia's dripping figure.

"She has fallen into the water!" every-

body cries, and we rush toward the stone on which he places her.

But she does not receive us very graciously. As soon as she is able to gasp anything, she says:

"Why do you come and stare at me? Of course I am wet, but that is not terrible. It was my own fault"—Charley's conscience-stricken expression of countenance causes this statement, perhaps—"and I shall simply have to go back to the hotel."

"Indeed you must!" I say, "or you will be ill. There is not a dry thread on you."

"You must take some brandy at once," says Eric, producing a flask.

"How on earth did you chance to fall?" asks Mrs. Cardigan.

"I think the sooner you start, and the faster you ride, the better," says Mr. Lanier, solicitously.

"Suppose we all go back?" says Eric. "The rain has detained us until it is late, and the other falls are much more difficult of access than this one. You will find the bushes—through which you will have to break in reaching them—very wet; and, altogether, we had better defer the remainder of the expedition."

We all agree to this. It *is* late, it *is* wet, and Sylvia's draggled appearance has a depressing effect upon our spirits. Poor Charley is evidently a prey to the liveliest sentiments of remorse and regret. He does not, as usual, assert his right to put Sylvia on her horse, and it is only after she has been elevated to the saddle by Mr. Lanier that he rides to her side and says:

"I can't possibly tell you how sorry I am that I should have been rude enough to cause your accident. I offer my most sincere apologies."

"The accident does not matter at all," replies Sylvia, indifferently.

When Aunt Markham sees this young lady she is of a different opinion, and hurries her away to change her dress, swallow hot draughts, and be coddled generally. In the course of an hour or two, however, she emerges in as bright looks and bright spirits as ever. I do not think that she attached any importance to the little scene behind the fall, or the trenchant monosyllable she was provoked into uttering; but Charley is of a different mind, and when she appears he is

guilty of one of those acts of folly which even the wisest men commit in such matters.

"I believe this is a piece of your property—which I have no right to retain," he says, coming up to her as she sits on the piazza, with the rest of the party gathered in a group around, and he detaches the knot of blue ribbon from his coat and presents it with an air of overwhelming courtesy.

A quick flush springs to her face. She is hurt and surprised, but few women are not able to hold their own when placed on the defensive like this. The eyes which glance up at him have a gleam in their soft depths.

"Yes, it is mine," she answers, quietly.

"Thank you for restoring it."

Then she takes the ribbon, fastens it carelessly on the side of her "bonny-brown hair," and turns to Mr. Lanier with a smile.

"Is it the worse for passing a night on Castle Rock?" she asks.

"Not when *you* wear it," he answers, a flash of brightness lighting up his face.

After this a return of hope plainly comes to this gentleman, and once more he is Sylvia's loyal slave. I do not wish to say that she absolutely encourages him, but with Charley on one side to enrage, and Mrs. Cardigan on the other to disappoint, the temptation to do so is strong—and not altogether resisted.

The next day we make an expedition to the other falls, and find their beauty worthy of all praise. Where the High Fall leaps in splendor through the dark-green woods that echo its reverberating roar, and where the Triple Falls sweep in white cascades over successive ledges of rock, one feels that "their colors and their forms" are indeed

"An appetite—a feeling and a love
That has no need of a remoter charm."

Along all its short course the Little River is a marvel of beauty, and the day cannot be far distant when tourists will seek its picturesque banks as they now seek better-known places. Indeed, nothing save its remoteness from railroads—remoteness that would gladden Mr. Ruskin's soul, but which has altogether a contrary effect on the souls of the inhabitants of the country—can account for the fact that this region is now so little frequented. To artists it offers a field wild, fresh, infinitely varied, and in some aspects scarcely less grand than that Western scenery which many of them cross a continent to

study; while to sportsmen its attractions are not less great. The speckled trout fill its streams, deer still abound in the coverts of its forests, and he who chooses to seek the wild fastnesses of the Black and the Balsam Mountains may carry back bear-skins and bear-stories in memory of his adventures.

We spend several days at Buck Forest, and there are other hunts, of which the result is different from those two already recorded. No less than three deer "die the death" out in the dewy haunts of the greenwood—two beautiful does and a fine stag. Eric, who shot the last, presents its antlers to Mrs. Cardigan, in fulfillment of his promise. Sylvia, however, does not obtain the fawn for which she expressed a desire. But for that unlucky hour at the Bridal-Veil Fall, she might perhaps obtain it; but Charley, who alone is likely to take any degree of trouble to gratify her, has since then stood resolutely on his dignity, and informs me confidentially that she has no heart—only a large amount of vanity, which he has sternly determined to gratify no longer.

I laugh (to myself) over this statement. I have heard something like it on several similar occasions, though I am forced to admit that the breach between these two seems wider and more serious now than ever before. They treat each other with a politeness that is overpowering, but their merry warfare of words is at an end, and on our various expeditions it is no longer Charley who rides at Sylvia's side, but always Mr. Lanier.

At the end of a week we go to Cæsar's Head, which place of resort lies over the border of South Carolina. Four thousand five hundred feet above the ocean stands the mountain—an outlying spur of the Blue Ridge—which bears this name because on the abrupt precipice that forms its southern face the jagged rocks wear the rude outline of a profile, supposed (no man can say why) to resemble that of Cæsar. On the summit, open to all the airs of heaven, stands an excellent hotel, where from June to October a stream of visitors come and go.

From Buck Forest to this point the distance is short. We leave the former place in the afternoon, and drive five or six miles along the road leading to Jones's Gap, the principal highway between Transylvania and Upper South Carolina. This gap is said to

be one of the most beautiful and the most easily crossed along the line of the Blue Ridge; but we do not follow it far enough to judge how well its reputation is deserved. By the time that we are fairly hemmed between the walls of the gorge, a road turns off, ascending a mountain, and a sign-board says "Cæsar's Head."

We follow the road and wind upward for two or three miles, with greenness surrounding us, through which scarcely a ray of sunlight steals, with the musical dash of unseen water in the glens below, with feathery ferns lining the road, and glancing streams dashing brightly across our way. So gradual is the ascent that there is very little strain on the horses, and now and then there are level stretches where they trot easily, and the equestrians canter so far ahead that we only catch an occasional gleam of Sylvia's blue veil through the interlacing foliage.

As we mount higher, the sun's level lines of gold stream into the forest-depths and make a quivering mystery of delight through the wide-spreading boughs, among the brown, mossy boles, in the beds of tall ferns—the woods seem spellbound into silence by the mellow glory of the waning afternoon. Involuntarily Eric murmurs those lines which, old and well known as they are, some days of this matchless season bring ever to one's mind:

"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky!
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night;
For thou must die."

"I call it insufferable to remind one of that fact," says Mrs. Cardigan. "As if we did not know it, or as if we cared to remember it!"

"Or as if to-morrow would not be as lovely," I chime in. "I hope nobody will suggest that, on top of this mountain, days are ever other than perfect. Ah, what a view!—Eric, stop the horses, pray, and tell us what it is."

Eric stops the horses obediently, and with one accord we rise in the carriage. We have not attained the summit yet, but we feel that it can scarcely offer anything finer than this view of heights so near at hand that their massive proportions stand fully revealed, draped in the softest haze. One bare rock of immense size towers among the wooded sides, and beyond is a glimpse—only a

glimpse—of a marvelous gleaming expanse, stretching away until it melts into the sky.

"How like the ocean!" says Aunt Markham, alluding to the last. "There surely *must* be ships out yonder.—Alice, we have seen nothing so beautiful as this!"

I do not contradict the assertion, nor remind the speaker that she has not had the advantage of standing on the Black Mountain. I, too, am more than half inclined to think that we have seen nothing more beautiful in all our wanderings.

"What is that rock, Eric?" I ask.

"It is the Table Rock," Eric answers. "Apart from the mountain on which it rests, it is five hundred feet in height."

"There seems to have been a difficulty about finding names for all these places," says Mrs. Cardigan, "else why should the nomenclature be so much repeated? This is not the Table Rock we saw from the Black—"

"Hardly," Eric laughs. "That was on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge, in North Carolina; this is on the southern side, in South Carolina.—Yes, we are coming!"

This is addressed to Charley, who has cantered back to beckon us forward. "You'll miss the sunset from the Head if you don't come on!" he shouts. "We are three-quarters of a mile from the top yet."

So, we go on, and before long Eric turns the horses from the road, drives up an eminence, and stops.

"Here is the Head," he says. "You must go out on the rock for the view."

It is only a few yards from the place where he has paused to the jutting rock, scattered over with gray boulders, which is the point of lookout. We go to the verge and pause—mute. What can one say of such a prospect as this which is spread before us unto the "fine faint limit of the bounding day?"

At our feet the mountain drops in a sheer descent of eighteen hundred or two thousand feet to the plain below, and, looking immediately down, the eye rests on a dark-green sea—the top of a dense forest, which clothes its base and spreads across a wild gorge to the chain of mountains which bounds the view on the right.

These are the mountains of which we have already had a partial view, and we see them now in all their grandeur, with the delicate haze wrapping them like smoke, and

deepening on each successive height as they recede away. South and east, with counties spread out like pleasure-grounds, and hills standing like mounds, the plains of South Carolina extend and fade into azure distance. There is here no line of trending hills, however remote, to form a boundary upon which the eye can rest. On the contrary, we feel that only the infirmity of our vision keeps us from seeing Charleston itself down by the sea, as our gaze is lost in the glimmering mist where land and sky blend together, while over the whole wide scene a magical blue light hangs like a glamour of enchantment.

"It is the dizziest place I ever looked over," says Mr. Lanier, retreating from the edge of the precipice. "Heavens! if a man were to fall!—Upon my word, Kenyon, unless your life is insured, I would advise you to be a little more cautious."

But Charley—who is seated on the verge, with his legs dangling over—only laughs.

"My life is not insured, but I don't mean to furnish you with a sensation by falling over," he says.—"I've been all through this forest below here deer-hunting," he goes on, addressing the rest of us. "You can imagine what kind of a place it is from its name—'The Dismal.'"

"All of you stop talking for a minute," says Eric, "and listen. Do you hear anything like the faint roar of distant waters?"

We are all silent for the space of a minute. Then Mrs. Cardigan says:

"I hear it—it is wind among the trees below, is it not?"

"I hear it also," says Sylvia, "and it seems to come from there." She points as she speaks to a deep, dark ravine, between the mountains.

"You are right," says Eric. "It *does* come from there, and it is the voice of the Saluda Falls. In some states of the atmosphere you can hear it much more distinctly than we do now. Yet, as the crow flies, the falls are at least three miles distant."

"And as the crow *doesn't* fly, they are considerably farther," remarks Charley. "I give you all warning that, if you let Eric persuade you to go there, you may prepare for the roughest time you have had yet. The road is dreadful as far as it extends, but after you leave it you have to climb a thousand feet up and seven hundred down before you reach the falls."

"Can't one go on horseback?" asks Sylvia.

"No—the horse was never born that could climb where you have to go!"

This does not sound very encouraging; but after all our experiences we do not suffer ourselves to be dismayed by the prospect of a little hard climbing. We only smile, and,

goes down in glory, turning the heights to violet, edged by burning gold. It is not here that the chief beauty of the prospect lies, however, but on the wide plain, with its changing tints, and the transparent shimmering belt of color that encircles its vast line of sky.

It is difficult to make up our minds to leave the scene even after the dusk shades of twilight have begun to deepen over it, and Eric is at last compelled to order us peremptorily to the carriages. It is a short drive to the hotel, which stands on the crest of the mountain, with the wonderful view visible from all its windows—a place of which to dream, for rest, or work, or, best of all, for the recovery of lost or shattered health.

"The air is like a tonic," people say who come here and, instead of leaving after a hurried glance at the prospect, are wise enough to remain for days or weeks; yet, in truth, no tonic was ever compounded of half the life-restoring properties which it possesses. For lightness, dryness, and purity, it cannot be surpassed, while it stimulates like an elixir of vitality, and is more brilliant



"It is the dizziest place I ever looked over."

seated on our rocky height, with the world spread far below, watch the beautiful evening lights, the wonderful soft shadows, shift and play over the great landscape, with its ineffably distant horizon.

All around this horizon, as the sun drops behind the western mountains, there comes a radiant, luminous glow—opalescent as the sea appears at sunset or sunrise. I have never seen any other place which abounds in such marvelous atmospheric effects as Cæsar's Head, and we are fortunate in witnessing some of the most lovely of these. Beyond the mountains on our right, a farther pale-blue range extends, and behind these the sun

iant in its clearness than can be imagined.

How cordially we are received by the pleasant host and hostess, and how well entertained, it is not easy to relate—but are not these things written in the book of memory? Truly there are some charming havens along the journey which men call life; and this mountain-lodge is one of them. Aunt Markham is pleased at once by the spotless cleanliness which distinguishes the house, the excellent and abundant table, the ordering of the whole *ménage*.

"I have been in many more pretentious hotels, where things were not half so well managed," she says.

We find a small company—small, because the cool September nights, which make us draw gladly round the blazing fires, are driving foolish people down to the low-country, where heat and dust still reign supreme. It is gratifying to relate that among this company are the friends whom Mrs. Cardigan expected to meet, and concerning whom some of us have been incredulous. Mr. Charlton and his party are gone, and Sylvia laughs when she learns that the Duponts have been here.

"Fancy," she says to me, "they passed Buck Forest the day we ascended Rich Mountain! Don't you *know* that, if they had imagined for a moment that we were there, they would have stopped?"

"It is a pity they did not," I answer. "Adèle might have soothed Charley's feelings, while Monsieur Victor could have played third string to your bow."

She does not notice this remark.

"I wonder where they can have been all this time?" she says, and turns back to our hostess to inquire.

When we separate for the night, Eric asks if we wish to be waked for the sunrise the next morning, and receives an uncompromising negative in reply. We do not gain very much by our refusal, however, since a party of more enterprising tourists are determined not to miss the phenomenon; and they walk about the passages at daylight, knock loudly on each other's doors, and call upon Jane, and Eliza, and Caroline, to wake, in tones which rouse not only Jane, Eliza, and Caroline, but also every one else in the house.

At breakfast Aunt Markham asks what are our plans for the day.

"Our plans for the day," replies Sylvia, "may be briefly defined. We intend to go to the Head, and—sit there. That view is like the ocean in two respects: first, because of its immensity; secondly, because I feel sure one can never weary of it."

"You are right," says a lady across the table. "I have been here six weeks, and I do not feel any more as if I had exhausted it than I did on the first day I came."

After breakfast we carry out this programme: we go to the Head, and sit there. It is the softest and fairest of half-summer, half-autumn days, with fleecy clouds floating in battalions across the sky, and flinging their shadows over the far-stretching pros-

pect. The winds which come to us are laden with freshness, and the varying lights and shades upon the scene make a picture of which it is impossible to weary. We spend the morning in the idlest fashion, climbing over the rocks, seeking shelter from the sun in the cool shade of that cave-like cleft which forms Cæsar's mouth, sketching a little, talking a great deal.

"I realize now," says Sylvia, "how an eagle feels when—

'Clasping the crag with hooked hands,
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.'

"I should not be surprised if some one of this party would add to the resemblance by falling like a thunderbolt," says Mr. Lanier, uneasily. "You must all have very steady heads to climb so recklessly over these rocks. I confess it makes me exceedingly giddy."

"Then I should strongly advise you to choose the safe obscurity of the background," says Charley. "This is not a height to be tampered with.—Hallo, Rupert! what are you about?"

"Only thinking of climbing this tree."

The tree in question grows on one of the escarpments of the precipice, and looks as if it would be a dizzy perch for an owl. Eric walks up to the young gentleman who regards it with climbing intentions, collars, shakes, and leads him away.

"Don't let me hear of your doing so foolhardy a thing!" he says. "I hoped you had more sense."

"What an admirable place this would have been for some Indian lovers to put an end to their existence!" says Mrs. Cardigan. "I wonder they never thought of leaping from it!"

"What a blessing that they did not!" says Sylvia.

Having devoted the morning to the Head, we are conducted by our host in the afternoon to a place a mile or two distant, called Stony Point, from which we have an admirable view of the whole face of the mountain as it sweeps round in a horseshoe curve, inclosing in its arms that dark forest known as the Dismal. We realize its grandeur more strikingly from this point than even from the summit, marking distinctly its great face of rock extending for miles, and seeing that on its cliff of lookout a human figure dwindles

to a hardly discernible pigmy. Immediately in front of us, as we sit enthroned on the broken masses of stone from which the point takes its name, lies the wild Saluda gorge



"Don't let me hear of your doing so foolhardy a thing!"

and the bold face of Table Rock, with a plumage of dense forest spread over all the intervening space, and ravishing tints of softest blues, and purples ranging in hue from faintest mauve to richest royal, on the splendid mountain-chain. We are on the left of the Head, and, when we turn our gaze southward, the gleaming world of the low-country lies below us, the westering sun shining on the roofs and spires of Greenville, which is the most considerable town that we overlook.

The next day Eric announces that we must go to Saluda Falls.

"It is our most important expedition," he says. "After that we can take our time in exploring the different points of interest around the mountains."

Nobody demurs, so the wagon and the saddle-horses are ordered,

"It is useless to think of taking the phaeton over *that* road," Eric says, in a tone which is calculated to give one a very poor opinion of the road indeed.

Sylvia, Charley, and Mr. Lanier, are, as usual, on horseback. Mrs. Cardigan sits by Eric on the seat of the wagon, while chairs are placed behind, in country fashion, for Rupert and myself. Now, if any one wishes to test the extreme of discomfort, let him attempt to sit on a chair in an open vehicle of such shallow depth that it amounts to no depth at all, and be conveyed over the steepest and roughest of mountain-roads. We endure it for a little while, then, as a particularly steep descent and sharp curve appears before us, Rupert makes a flying leap and alights on the ground.

"That is preferable to being pitched out, as I should have been," he says. "You had better follow my example, Alice."

I decide before long that I will do so, for the road is simply terrible.

"It was only made last year," Eric says, by way of apology; and Mrs. Cardigan raises her eyebrows as she asks, "Do you call it made now?"

In fact it is *not* made, farther than that



The New Road.

the trees and undergrowth have been cut away sufficiently to admit of the passage of a vehicle—if passage it can be called when the wheels graze the trunks of trees that line the

way, when the turns are so abrupt that only the most careful driving could save any wheeled conveyance from an overturn, and only the best of springs stand the constant jolting over stumps, and roots, and stones. Presently we reach a point where the wagon must be left, and where the equestrians are told to dismount.

"The mountain behind Paint Rock was child's-play to that!" says Mrs. Cardigan, addressing Sylvia, and pointing to the height over which we have to climb before we can obtain a glimpse of the falls.

"Not exactly child's-play—only good training," answers Sylvia, taking off the water-proof which served her as a riding-skirt and throwing it over her saddle.

Certainly Charley was right. Nothing which we have been called upon to undertake before can equal this which we attempt now. Of the nearly perpendicular ascent over rocks and through dense undergrowth, language fails me to speak. Now and then—breathless with climbing, disordered in attire—we pause and ask each other if anything that may be in store for us can possibly repay us for such an exertion.

It is the highest possible tribute to the falls that we answer this question unhesitatingly in the affirmative when we finally reach the point from which their beauty fully bursts upon us.

A stream of flashing silver, of white foam and misty spray, leaps in successive cascades through a world of green foliage, over massive walls of rock, down a mountain-gorge hundreds of feet in depth, and, not content with this journey from the clouds, tumbles, whirls, and surges, over the rocks as it pours through the ravine.

The magnificence of the scene almost takes away our breath, and hushes all terms of admiration on our lips. There are no words which would not sound trivial and impertinent with the thunder of the cataract in our ears and its tumultuous splendor before our eyes. We looked for nothing half so beautiful, half so majestic in its beauty, as this, and we feel as if we had wandered carelessly into a sanctuary. All around tower the mountains, clothed to their crests with virgin forest, far up—where the green line of trees meets the blue of the overarching sky—we catch the first silvery gleam of the water as it plunges downward, and we mark it

leap from point to point, over crags, and precipices, and masses of rock, until it reaches the place where we stand.

"The height of the entire fall is seven hundred feet," says Eric, when he thinks that we are all as much impressed as can be desired. "And the Veil yonder—that lovely cascade about midway—is one hundred and fifty."

"Can one go behind that Veil?" asks Mrs. Cardigan, with a mischievous glance at Sylvia.

"One can go behind it with a pretty good certainty of being well wetted," Charley answers. "I'll take you up there if you say so."

"I believe I would rather have a more careful guide," she says, glancing at Mr. Lanier.

But that gentleman pays no heed to the mute appeal. He is not fond of unnecessary climbing, and has already remarked that he thinks a waterfall can be best seen from the foot of it.

"One appreciates its height then," he says, "and really, if there was a greater volume of water here, this would be one of the finest cataracts in the country."

"I do not think that anything could make it more beautiful," says Sylvia, with her head thrown back, and her gaze fastened on the far depths, where, over battlemented rocks, and amid a wealth of verdure, the flashing water leaps, sending its spray and voice heavenward.

And in this opinion we agree. Nothing could add to the grandeur of this gorge, into which the slanting sunbeams scarcely pierce, and where, amid the misty gloom, the voice of the stream unceasingly sounds, telling to the silent earth some secret whispered first on that ancient day when time itself had birth. We linger for hours, and at last tear ourselves reluctantly away—pausing for one last glance after another at the plunging water, the abounding foliage, and picturesque rocks, which form a scene so beautiful that the most insensible sight-seer could never forget it.

CHAPTER XVII.

And there are haunts in that green land, oh! who
 may dream or tell
 Of all the shaded loveliness it hides in grot and dell,
 By fountains flinging rainbow-spray on dark and
 glossy leaves,
 And bowers wherein the forest-dove her nest un-
 troubled weaves?"

THERE is an enchanted flavor about the days that follow. They are the very cream of all our summer idling. We are "on the hills, like gods together, careless of mankind," and this exaltation has a charm difficult to define. The clouds which discharge themselves upon the valleys below, while we sit serene and secure on the mountain's crest, are types of many other things. Down on that heavenly-looking plain all the vexations and troubles of existence are rife, while we are uplifted above them, and hardly disturb ourselves to wonder how the world is pursuing its course. We even grow indifferent to the mails—sure sign of content!—and scarcely glance into a newspaper.

"There is no telling when we shall be more than four thousand feet above the sea again," says Sylvia, "so let us make the most of it."

There can be no doubt that we *do* make the most of it. The air of Cæsar's Head stimulates to exertions which would be impossible in a less bracing atmosphere, and we soon become accomplished pedestrians, taking our way, alpenstocks in hand, to all places of interest and note around the mountain. These places are almost inexhaustible. People who come and see only the view from the Head have no idea that they leave unseen behind them tenfold more than that. It is only a part—and a small part—of the abounding loveliness which lies within reach of all who do not fear a little exertion. Being in the midst of the Blue Ridge—which makes here its sweeping curve between the Carolinas—one can wander in no direction without finding scenes of the grandest beauty, cliffs and palisades of rock, great sweeps of wooded mountains at hand, with blue ranges afar, fairy-like glens where the cool plash of water is never still, and the limitless expanse of the azure low-country. But, however far we may have wandered, however steep the way may have been, we never fail to gather on the Head when evening comes,

to watch the sun sink behind the western hills. What magical coloring we see on land and sky at these times, what wonderful cloud-effects, what visions of a glory that seems almost celestial, only a poet could tell, and the poet who shall sing to the world of these fair scenes has not yet arisen.

On an evening of this description we are scattered over the rocks, and the sun is sinking among clouds that remind one of the cohorts of the Assyrian king, so gorgeously are they "gleaming with purple and gold," when Mrs. Cardigan directs our attention to a silver crescent, shining faintly out of the sky above.

"There is the new moon," she says. "It is good luck to see it for the first time in a clear sky. I hope the good luck is for my journey to-morrow."

"Are you going to-morrow?" Sylvia asks. "What a pity! Why should you end anything so pleasant as these golden days?"

"Because my friends are going," the lady answers, "and I don't know that there is any reason why I should remain behind. This life is delightful, and I dislike exceedingly to leave you all, with whom I have spent so charming a time, but there comes an hour when all pleasant associations must end. I have come so far with you that I wish I could induce you to come with *me* now.—Mr. Markham, is there no chance of such a thing? Let me see how many inducements I can offer! First, the North Georgia scenery—my friends talk of stopping for a glimpse of Tallulah and Toccoa."

"I fear that we must defer seeing Tallulah and Toccoa until we take our trip next summer to the Balsam," Eric answers. "It is necessary for us to turn *our* faces homeward. In a day or two we shall start for Hickory-Nut Gap."

"These are the last days of September," says Mr. Lanier. "The summer is very nearly ended—in fact, may be said to *be* ended."

"But autumn is better than summer," says Sylvia, "and I want—oh, I desperately want—to spend October in the mountains. It is beautiful everywhere, but it must seem divine here, when—

'... his winds blow fresh, and his sunsets flame,
 And the whole earth burns with his crimson fame
 The prince of the months—October.'"

"There can be no doubt that people, as a rule, leave the mountains much too soon,"

says Eric, "but the claims of business take me home, and I shall take the rest of you."

"If they will be taken," says Mrs. Cardigan, "but I offer a warm welcome and two or three weeks of further idling to all deserters."

In making the offer, she looks directly at Mr. Lanier, and it strikes me as a little odd that this gentleman seems a trifle embarrassed as he pulls his mustache.

"Can there be any kind of an understanding between them?" I think—and then I look at Sylvia.

The countenance of the latter is altogether inscrutable. She is gazing calmly into space, and, if there is a suspicion of an amused smile dimpling the corners of her mouth, it is the only sign she gives of appreciating the game of the fair widow.

Presently the sunset fades, and the different members of the party begin to straggle back toward the hotel. Neither Charley nor Rupert is with us. Two or three days before they went down to Buck Forest for hunting, and have not yet returned. Mrs. Cardigan and Eric leave the Head first, Sylvia lingers to watch the crescent moon brighten from silver to gold as the glowing tints die out of the sky, and of course Mr. Lanier lingers with her. I leave them on the rocks to go down the winding path which leads to the mouth, remembering that I left my sketch-book there earlier in the day.

I stay a few minutes and then climb leisurely back. When I have nearly reached the top, I pause in consternation. What is this?—Words full of significance reach my ears. Believing that they are alone, Mr. Lanier has plunged into his long-deferred declaration, and has plainly met his certain rejection.

"I do not wish to press anything which is unwelcome upon you," I hear him say, in such tones of mingled mortification and pride as rarely come from a man's lips on any other occasion, "but if you would take time to consider—"

"It is useless," Sylvia interrupts. "You would have a right to consider me a coquette if I gave you any hope that my answer could ever be different from what it is now. If I have seemed to encourage you, I hope you will pardon me. It is not always easy to know one's own mind—and I have not known mine until lately."

"And are you quite sure that you know it now?" he asks, anxiously.

"I am quite sure," she answers, decidedly.

There is a moment's silence after this.

"Dear me!" I think, "what an uncomfortable situation for me! Shall I go back to the cave and try to skirt round the bowlders and get away without their seeing me?"

While I hesitate, in doubt which plan to adopt, Mr. Lanier's tones again break on the stillness.

"I suppose that means," he says—his voice betraying all the sore jealousy which he feels—"that Kenyon has been more fortunate than myself."

"It is not necessary," says Sylvia, haughtily, "to introduce any other name into this conversation. I am very sorry for the pain which I may be forced to give you; but you must believe that my answer would be the same under any circumstances."

"If he believes *that*," I think, "he has less penetration than I give him credit for."

Mr. Lanier does not believe it. If the unpleasant fact of rejection is certain, what man is going to lose the satisfaction of believing that a prior infatuation for some other man is the cause of it?

"Your preference for Mr. Kenyon has been so marked," he says, stiffly, "that others besides myself have remarked it."

"That means Mrs. Cardigan, I suppose," answers Sylvia, scornfully; "but may I beg to know why you thought it worth while to ask your question of a few minutes ago, if my preference for Mr. Kenyon seemed to you so 'marked'?"

"This is becoming stormy," I think. "Really I must get away." Then I succeed in skirting the bowlders unobserved, and take my way to the hotel through the falling dusk.

I have not been seated on the piazza fifteen minutes when the others appear in sight—walking silently, as I observe with an inward laugh. They bear themselves very well, however, when they join the company, who greet them with inquiries about their late stay.

"We were watching the new moon," says Sylvia. "It is lovely."

"But it has the old moon in its arms, which I have been told is a sign of bad weather," says Mr. Lanier.

"How can you make such a disagreeable prophecy," says Mrs. Cardigan, "when we all want the good weather to last until we are out of the mountains?"

"You will be out of them to-morrow," he says, "and on reflection I am inclined to accompany you. I think I have had enough of the beauties of Nature for one season."

"Indeed!" she says—and the interjection is full of significance. "In that case you will not feel inclined to go with us to Tallulah?"

"No—only as far as Greenville," he answers. Then he turns to Eric.—"You are going to Flat Rock, are you not?" he asks. "May I trouble you to take my horse that far and return him to my uncle? One of your servants can ride him, can he not?"

"Certainly," Eric answers. "There is no difficulty about that, but I am sorry you mean to leave us."

"I am sorry to be obliged to do so," the young man answers, with a commendable attempt at civility, "but I—ah—have business which calls me away."

After this there is nothing to be said, and consequently silence falls. Everybody knows what has happened as well as I know it. Aunt Markham grasps my arm with painful force, and, muttering something about "night-air" and "rheumatism," leads me into the house and faces me solemnly.

"What does this mean?" she asks, as if I were accountable for the vagaries of a young man in love. "Can it be possible that Sylvia has discarded Mr. Lanier?"

"I am afraid she has," I answer. "He would hardly be likely to go away unless something of the kind had occurred."

"Good Heavens!" says Aunt Markham. For a minute she can say no more than that, her feelings being too deep for utterance. Then she shakes her head in wrathful indignation. "The misguided girl!" she says. "I give her up! I will have nothing more to do with her affairs! She will never have a better offer—never! And to refuse it—for what?"

She asks the question with tragic effect, but I am not provided with an answer; so I only shake my head, and, since some one comes in at the moment, further conversation is impossible.

Mr. Lanier adheres to his resolution, and Mrs. Cardigan has the pleasure of car-

rying him off in her train the next morning. It is a pleasure much lessened, however, by the consciousness that he is a rejected suitor, and that everybody in the little world which she leaves behind is aware of the fact. She shrugs her shoulders aside when she bids me good-by.

"I suppose I shall have to play consol-er," she says. "It is not at all in my line. Can you suggest any appropriate form of consolation?"

"I have no doubt you will soon find one," I answer—and so we part. The last I see of Mr. Lanier he is pensively pulling the ends of his mustache, and gazing down at his boots. Perhaps he is reflecting on the mountain-sides up which he has toiled, the end whereof is weariness and disappointment.

A few days later we find it necessary to leave this dwelling in the sky. There comes a morning when the carriages and horses stand before the door, when the trunks and boxes, the grasses and ferns, the wraps and umbrellas, are brought out, when hands are shaken and last words uttered, when we bid a cordial farewell to our kind hosts, and roll away.

We pause on the Head for a view of the wonderful prospect, but a gray mist is shrouding it—a mist which later in the day will lift with soft and beautiful effect, and which wavers to and fro, now revealing the sea of dark-green foliage below, and the massive outlines of the neighboring mountains, then capriciously closing over them again; but we cannot wait for it to disperse.

"After all, perhaps it is better so," says Sylvia. "Nature wears a veil in order that her loveliness may not make it too hard for us to go."

We accept this explanation and return to the carriages. Before we have gone half-way down the mountain, all signs of mist have vanished, and the sun is lighting up the depths of the woods with streams of gold.

The drive to Buck Forest is delightful, and when we reach the latter place we find Charley and Rupert, who have not troubled themselves to return to Cæsar's Head, ready to join us.

"We've had glorious hunting!" the latter declares at once, while the former brings a pair of antlers which he presents to Sylvia. "You spoke as if you might like them," he

says, "so I thought I would offer them to you. I am sorry that I have not been able to get the fawn for which you expressed a desire."

"I am not sorry," she answers with a laugh. "It would have been very troublesome to carry; but thank you for the antlers. I am glad to have them, and I shall keep them in memory of our pleasant expedition."

While she speaks, I see that Charley is surveying the party with an expression of surprise. After a minute he falls back, and I hear him say to Eric:

"What the deuce has become of Lannier?"

"He went down the country a day or two ago with Mrs. Cardigan," Eric answers. "I think he has had enough of mountains to last the rest of his life."

Charley laughs—half amused, half scornful.

"What did such a muff ever come to them for?" he asks.

This is all the sympathy which the muff in question obtains from the person whom he esteems his fortunate rival. Indeed, Aunt Markham is the only member of the party who mourns his departure. Sylvia is evidently relieved, and something of a tacit reconciliation takes place between Charley and herself. So, in a state of amicable good-fellowship, we bid our friends at Buck Forest farewell, and set our horses' heads toward Hickory-Nut Gap.

The road leads us through the pass where the Little River pours in foaming rapids down to the house where we spent the night on our way to Buck Forest. Then we bear away to the right, and, leaving the fertile valleys and wooded hills of Transylvania behind, ascend to the high plateau of Henderson. The highways here are as admirable as any traveler could desire—white and firm, and flecked with shade. The horses appreciate them after the hard service which they have recently seen, and carry us along at so good a rate of speed that the afternoon is not half gone when we find ourselves in the midst of the settlement of Flat Rock. Country-seats appear on all sides; avenues of white pines, beautiful park-like grounds, surround them; sometimes the house is invisible, and we see only the broad gates and the sweeping carriage-drive that leads to it. There are signs everywhere of the rock formation

which gives a name to the region. On the hillsides are great sheets of brown-stone, and everything indicates that the same stone forms the foundation of the country.

"I suppose you are aware that this is a provincial Charleston," says Eric. "Long ago, a number of the wealthy planters of the South Carolina coast built summer residences here, and made a society within themselves. A spirit of change has passed over the place since the war, I understand, and a few outsiders have come in and bought some of the residences; but, on the whole, it is still, socially as well as picturesquely, attractive."

"And the climate is perfect," says Aunt Markham.

There can be no doubt of this fact. Almost on a level with the summit of the Blue Ridge lies the plateau, and though not much higher than Asheville, its atmosphere is very much drier, owing to the absence of streams. The peculiar brilliancy of the air, to which we have by this time become accustomed, is nowhere more marked, and the average temperature is remarkably even.

There is an excellent hotel here, which we find filled with South Carolinians. The distinctive Charleston face appears, the distinctive Charleston accent is heard on all sides.

"We have got back to civilization," says Aunt Markham, complacently looking round on the carpets and easy-chairs, which we have not seen since we left Asheville.

"If this is civilization, it seems very tame after our life in the woods," says Sylvia, discontentedly.

"Civilization always seems tame to outlaws," remarks Charley.

"No doubt you all feel like resting this afternoon," says Eric, addressing the company, "but we will spend to-morrow here, and you may like to visit some of the places in the neighborhood."

At this suggestion Sylvia expresses disdain.

"As if, after all that we have seen, we could care about mere parks and pleasure-grounds!" she says.

"I shall be glad to see them," says Aunt Markham. "I may obtain an idea for the new flower-garden at home."

Consequently we set forth the next morning on a round of sight-seeing. It is not worth while to record our impressions of the

different places to which we are conducted. Country-seats with lawns and terraces, artificial lakes and flower-gardens blazing with brilliance, are to be found in many parts of the world besides Flat Rock. Aunt Markham is greatly interested, but the rest of us are unequivocally bored, and find it difficult to repress a sentiment of contempt for the "views" which we are called upon to admire. In truth, many of these are very charming—but they strike us as tame after the wilder scenes from which we come. This is not the fault of the views, however, as we are magnanimous enough to admit.

When we think of returning to the hotel, Eric says: "There is one more place where we will go. It is called 'the old De Choiseul House,' and was built by a certain Count de Choiseul, who lived in Charleston for some years and had a summer residence here. The place has a very foreign aspect, and was uninhabited when I heard of it last."

We turn into a disused road leading across an old field thickly set with golden-rod and wild-asters. This leads up a gradual slope, and finally through a fallen gate into what has obviously once been a park, but is now an overgrown wilderness.

A wilderness of singular beauty, however—a domain so fair, so deserted, so still, that we think of the legends of knights and ladies wandering in enchanted woods. Shall we meet Una here, or *Rosalind* in her boyish masquerade, or *Jaques* pouring out his melancholy to the trees? So we ask each other, smiling at our own folly in associating these fables of the Old World with this New World beauty. Yet there is something in the aspect of the wood suggestive of such thoughts. The road which we are following has plainly once been laid off with great care and regard to effect, but now the untrimmed boughs droop so low over it that more than once they threaten danger to our eyes, and the mouldering leaves of many autumns are crushed by our passing wheels.

No sign of any habitation appears as we go on, following windings and curves which seem endless, farther and farther into the world of fairy greenness. Golden sunshine streams softly into the gloom, crimson touches appear here and there on the trees, ferns and mosses grow luxuriantly on the damp hill-sides, down a rocky glen a stream comes flowing in a lovely cascade. There are traces

of paths around this, and a rustic bridge falling to decay.

Not far from this spot we obtain our first glimpse of a house through the dense verdure. A few minutes later we emerge on a broad, sunny terrace, and find that we have approached from the side a château of gray stone, with a finely-arched doorway and handsome wings. The style of architecture is altogether French, and the house appears to be in a state of very good preservation. The doors and windows are securely fastened, so we cannot enter; but it is easy to tell that the rooms are spacious and lofty, while the windows of the ground-floor are wide and tall, and open on the terrace.

The situation is simply superb. The house faces toward the west, crowning a hill, which, from the terrace already mentioned, slopes abruptly down for at least a hundred feet. Below is a stretch of meadow-land, through the midst of which a stream marked by fringing willows takes its way. Beyond are woods rich with autumnal beauty, their varying tints making a glowing background. Behind are bold hills, and again behind these the blueness of distant mountains.

"What a place to drink after-dinner coffee, and talk after-dinner gossip!" says Sylvia, regarding the terrace with approval.

"What a place to talk sentiment by moonlight!" says Charley.

"A very good place for luncheon, I think," says Aunt Markham.—"Rupert, bring the basket from the carriage."

"Eric, tell us something interesting about the people who lived here," cries Sylvia. "Make up something if you don't know anything to tell. It is a place which bears every appearance of having a story connected with it. Why should it be deserted in this melancholy fashion? Is it haunted?"

"If so, I am not aware of the fact," says Eric. "The Count de Choiseul was an elderly gentleman of elegant habits, who lived here—with his two daughters, I believe—and no doubt often took coffee on this terrace."

"An elderly gentleman, indeed!" says Sylvia, with scorn. "I know better than that. He was young, and handsome, and melancholy, like all poetic exiles, with dark eyes and a fascinating smile."

"And a snuff-box," says Charley.

"Being wealthy and charming," Sylvia goes on, "he soon persuaded a young Ameri-

can beauty to discard countless adorers and marry him. They lived here very happily until the arrival of a mysterious stranger from France."

"There is too much mystery in the story," says Rupert. "I object to it. Come and take some chicken. It is very good."

"After this," proceeds the narrator, "a change came over the young bride. She seemed to shrink from her husband; she grew pale and lost her beauty. In the end she died mysteriously, and her ghost walks up and down this terrace every night."

"What killed her?" asks Rupert, with his mouth full of the chicken he had praised.

"The loss of her beauty, probably," says Charley. "That is a death-blow to some women."

"The best story-telling is that which leaves a margin to the imagination," says Sylvia. "I should like to enter this house. I have no doubt I should find her chamber in one of those wings, with everything exactly as she left it—even to a pair of blue-satin slippers."

"I should like to find *those*," says Rupert. "If you will indicate which wing you think her chamber likely to be in, I'll climb up and break open a window."

"I don't wonder that anybody, whether in the flesh or out of it, should come to admire this view," says Eric, who is seated in the shade of the arched door, with a sandwich in one hand and a chicken-wing in the other.

It is difficult to say how long we linger after luncheon is over, watching the loveliness of the shadow-dappled scene. The beauty, the subtle sadness, are too deep for expression. Save for the occasional notes of birds, everything is profoundly still. The bright sunshine seems full of pathos. On each side of the silent house is the interlacing shade of the park—

"Now dim with shadows wandering blind,
Now radiant with fair shapes of light."

At last we wander off to explore further. Behind the house, on the slope of a hill, we find a conservatory and grapery, with a broken flight of steps leading to them. Both are falling to decay, the glass broken, the flowers and vines dead. The grapery is large, and must have been beautiful, I think, as I stand within, picturing green leaves and purple clusters of fruit, with the sun beating warm-

ly on the glass roof. The reality is very different from this picture—a melancholy vine with a few yellow leaves clinging to it, and a bird distressfully fluttering to and fro. The conservatory looks quite as sad. Round the door a few petunias have taken root and are flourishing. Sylvia stoops and pulls one.

"For a souvenir," she says.

I want a souvenir also, but I prefer one from the house, so I turn my steps in that direction. Over the rear of the building a growth of English ivy spreads, climbing to the very roof. It is in bloom, and I have seldom seen anything more beautiful than the deep green of the leaves and the delicate tint of the blossoms against the soft gray stone. I pull a long spray, and, thus laden, go back to the carriage where Eric is calling us.

"I am glad that we came here," says Sylvia, as we drive away. "The other places which we have seen are only ordinary country-seats—charming enough in their way, but thoroughly commonplace. *This* is a deserted castle in an enchanted wood."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Oh, set us down together in some place
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
Where naught but rocks and I can see her face
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track—
The golden age, the golden age come back!"

"TO-DAY," says Eric, when we start from Flat Rock the next morning, "we shall cross the Blue Ridge, and go down to the lower world again."

"How do we cross?" asks Aunt Markham. "By Hickory-Nut Gap?"

"Partly," he answers. "We go through the Reedy Patch Gap, and come into Hickory-Nut about a third of the way down—high enough for the grandest scenery, however."

"If you wish to appreciate the elevation of the country," says Charley, "observe that in approaching the Blue Ridge we shall not rise at all—but simply travel on a level until we begin to descend the mountains."

We accordingly observe this—which, indeed, could hardly fail to be observed by any one who either enters or leaves the transmontane region. As we bowl along the excellent roads of Henderson, with the blue

chain of mountains directly in our front, we are hardly able to realize that when evening comes they will be no longer in front, but behind us.

The day is beautiful, an autumn crispness in the air, an autumn glory in the streaming sunshine and richly-tinted foliage. We look wistfully at the lovely landscape as we travel onward. There is something of sadness in saying farewell to this fair land, in ending the pleasant Bohemian existence of the past two months, and turning our faces toward the ordinary life which awaits us in the world below. But we remind each other that all summer holidays must end, and that ours has been a decided success. It is true that we are all a half-dozen shades darker than when we left home, but complexions are not the only things in the world to be considered, and we have gained health and strength enough to make us regard tan and sunburn with philosophy.

"How differently we should feel if we had gone to a fashionable watering-place!" says Sylvia. "What unsatisfactory sensations of the *vanitas vanitatem* order one has at the fag end of a season of that description! One has spent a great deal of money, ruined any number of dresses, danced one's self thin, conceived a disgust for one's fellow-creatures—and had hardly three days of real enjoyment to pay for it all!—while in Arcadia one spends little money, needs few dresses, and enjoys one's self to the top of one's bent! Hereafter I shall throw my cap in the air and cry '*Vive la Nature!*'"

"Yes," asserts Charley. "No doubt you will—for a month. We shall see whether your pastoral fever lasts till next summer. I prophesy that it will have died into ashes before that time."

"Which means, I suppose, that you are already anxious to leave me behind when you take your hunting-trip to the Balsam," she retorts. "But I mean to go! I give you warning of that."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," he replies, with a smile.

In profitable conversation like this we pass the time as we travel on, drawing nearer and nearer to the mountains, which begin to lose their blue tint and loom in dark, rugged masses before us. Presently we enter fairly among them, and Eric says, as a

clear, rapid stream comes dashing in turbulent beauty across our path:

"This is Reedy Patch Creek. We shall cross it more than a dozen times before we reach the Broad River, to which it is bound."

"Pray tell me," says Aunt Markham, "what is the origin of this name? Reedy Patch—how absurd!"

"It seems so," says Eric. "I can throw no light on its origin, further than that at some remote time there must have been a patch of reeds somewhere about here."

Like all gaps, this Reedy Patch is a narrow defile, winding through the heart of the mountains which hem it on each side, and follows closely the impetuous stream already mentioned. The latter pours downward in foaming rapids and cascades, and, although forced once to turn a rude mill, for the remainder of its way dashes uncurbed over the rocks that strew its course, and crosses our road again and again, so that we have the music of its water first on one side and then on the other. The way is wild and beautiful, but the road is the worst which we have found in all our wanderings. Apart from its natural disadvantages, it has been badly washed by the heavy August rains, and altogether it is so hard on the vehicles that John shakes his head forebodingly, and, whenever we stop to water the horses, he goes round and shakes all the wheels.

"Anything wrong?" asks Eric, turning to watch this operation.

"No, sir, nothing wrong *yet*," answers John, with a strong emphasis on the last word. "One of these wheels is pretty weak, though, and I don't think it'll go much farther."

"It will carry us down the mountain, won't it?"

"It *may*," returns John, cautiously, "if the roads git better. *These* is enough to tare a carriage to pieces."

"The roads will get better when we enter Hickory-Nut," says Rupert. "Don't you remember how good they were as we came up?"

"There's bin some heavy freshets since then," observes John, darkly.

In consequence of the weak wheel, a good deal of walking is done by the occupants of the carriage, over those parts of the road which are particularly bad. We travel

at such a slow rate of progress that our passage through the gap seems endless. As we advance the scene grows wilder and more beautiful with every step. Great mountains inclose us on all sides—their tall crests towering against the blue sky, and their forest-clad sides burning with the gorgeous tints of autumn.

Rough though the road may be, this part of the journey is a delight. The encircling hills "clasp us in their deep repose," as they stand before, around, behind—the farther ones wearing a faint, mauve-like haze over their mighty shoulders. We are in the heart of the Blue Ridge, and its heights hem us like the serried ranks of an army.

"Mountains are beautiful when one views them from a distance," says Sylvia, "but they are sublime when one is among them! Nothing else in the world impresses one with such a sense of steadfast, unchangeable grandeur. The sea shifts: *these* never do. One finds one's self repeating all the time, 'Fixed as the everlasting hills.'"

"But they are not everlasting," says Eric. "Geology—"

At that word Sylvia stops her ears.

"I don't believe in geology," she says. "I believe in common-sense and—poetry."

"Two rather incompatible things, are they not?" asks Charley.

"We shall be at the foot of the Bald—the shaking Bald—this evening," says Rupert. "I wish it would give us a few shakes."

"If it did you would soon become anxious to leave the neighborhood," says Eric. "The shakes of the Bald are not trifling. I was fortunate enough to be on the mountain when one of them occurred. It was the most severe earthquake I ever felt, accompanied by a rumbling noise unlike any other noise that I ever heard."

"Earthquakes are common in this region, are they not?" asks Sylvia.

"Not exactly common, but they occur at intervals. The earliest Cherokee traditions give accounts of them, and they have often occurred since white men have held the country. None, however, have been so long continued as the shocks of the Bald—which rumbled and shook with slight intermissions for more than a month."

"Whereupon all the people who lived on or near the mountain forsook their business,

and became extremely pious—until the rumbling and shaking ceased," says Charley. "Then they forgot their piety with as much celerity as they had gained it."

"A certain Methodist preacher is said to be accountable for the whole excitement," says Eric. "Being disgusted with the hard-heartedness of his flock, and their insensibility to all his appeals, he desired the Lord to make the mountain move beneath their feet. Shortly afterward the mountain *did* move, and a gratifying number of instantaneous conversions took place."

We are strolling along the road while we talk in this manner, the carriages being some distance ahead, with Aunt Markham's bonnet nodding to and fro, in testimony to the roughness of the road, over the lowered phaeton top. Far above us rise the mountains, beside us brawls the stream, on the banks which inclose our way glowing leaves shine, the delicate fronds of ferns appear, tiny streams trickle, there is perpetual moisture and perpetual shade.

Presently the carriage stops: Aunt Markham turns and beckons us to draw near.

"It strikes me that we had better take our luncheon," she says.

"Not yet," answers Eric. "It is early, and we have not passed through the Reedy Patch. Wait till we reach the Broad River, where we enter Hickory-Nut Gap. That will be a good halting-place, and there is a house near there where John can buy something for the horses."

"Very well," says Aunt Markham, resignedly, "but it is my opinion that we shall spend the day passing through Reedy Patch."

"I hope not," says Eric.—"Now, Alice, you had better enter the carriage for a while."

I enter accordingly, and we press on more rapidly for the next mile or two. The descent is now very marked, and before long we cross Reedy Patch Creek for the last time, and reach the Broad River.

Why this stream should have such a misnomer attached to it no one can say—further than that the early settlers of the country (in a spirit of irony, it is supposed) named all the narrow rivers they could find "Broad."

"First Broad and Second Broad are below here," says Eric. "This is properly Rocky Broad—and you must admit that the first part of the name is well bestowed."

"We admit that," says Sylvia, "since

there seem to be more rocks than water in the channel. Is it so along its entire course?"

"It is this way until it leaves the mountains," says Eric. "It rises in this gap, and not far above here Hickory-Nut Creek flows into it. Now we enter the grandest pass in the whole line of the Blue Ridge, and if you can restrain your anxiety for luncheon a little longer, mother, we can halt at a delightful wayside spring in the midst of the finest scenery."

"I can wait very easily," says Aunt Markham, who does not fancy this allusion to her appetite.

So we go on, crossing the river, and keeping it on our right as we turn down Hickory-Nut Gap. We are not more than three miles from the foot of the mountains, but along this three miles, as Eric has said, is some of the finest scenery of the magnificent pass. Much as we have heard of it, we are almost awestruck by its grandeur.

"Swannanoa is nothing, *nothing* to this!" cries Sylvia, as we wind downward, pausing at every few steps.

Indeed, not only Swannanoa Gap, but everything else that we have seen is dwarfed to comparative insignificance by the majestic beauty that surrounds us. What was the gorge of the French Broad to these mighty mountains which rise more than two thousand feet over our heads, and stand not more than a quarter of a mile apart, while far down in the green chasm below us the Broad River whirls and foams around its countless rocks? The day has now reached its zenith, and is perfect in splendor. Our road, on the eastern side of the gap, is well shaded, but the sunlight falls broadly on the mass of varied foliage beneath, bringing out every vivid color and jewel-like tint.

Suddenly Rupert, who is riding in front, halts abruptly and points across the gorge. The next moment we see what he is indicating. Far up, over the top of a mountain, a stream of flashing silver falls down the bare face of a rock, and is lost to sight amid the verdure which meets it. The sunlight strikes the cascade with dazzling effect, and draws the arc of a prismatic rainbow upward from its spray.

"That water," says Eric, "falls three hundred and fifty feet, and most of it is dissolved into spray before it reaches the bottom of the rock."

"How high is it above us?" asks Sylvia.

"About nine hundred feet. If we had time, you might climb up to it. I did so once, but found the ascent very steep. Now see what a superb mountain stands next! It is like a castle—only no castle was ever half so grand. And yonder is a glimpse of the Chimney Rock. We shall see it better as we get farther down."

We pause, enraptured and overwhelmed. A castle, indeed! What castle ever built by mortal hands would not seem a flimsy toy beside this immense mountain, with its sides of solid rock, worn smooth by the floods of uncounted centuries, and rising sheer and bare for more than a thousand feet? On one side of this the peculiar rocks which form the Chimney stand—so high and so apparently toppling that it seems as if the slightest touch would send them down the precipice which they overlook.

"Here is the spring where we stop for dinner," says Eric. "This arrangement has been a feature of Hickory-Nut Gap from time immemorial. You find these springs scattered all along the road to the top of the mountains."

"How pleasant and Arcadian!" says Sylvia, regarding kindly the primitive arrangement of which he speaks. A small stream comes trickling down through mossy rocks, and is conducted into a miniature trough of bark, through which it flows, and pours from its mouth in a clear, inviting thread of crystal. On the outstretched bough of a tree near by a gourd hangs.

"Drink, weary pilgrims, drink, and pray"

that we may some time return to this beautiful country," says Sylvia, gayly, filling the gourd and offering it to the company.

None of us refuse the pledge. Even Aunt Markham looks on past dangers and discomforts with philosophy, and declares that she has enjoyed the expedition very much.

The spot selected for this last of our many wayside dinners is one of the loveliest points on the gap. The road, which is uniformly excellent—in this respect a great contrast to the one over Swannanoa—is here arched with shade through which the warm sunbeams quiver and dance, and fling capricious shadows on the way. A hundred feet below the river rushes between a world of

picturesque foliage, the changing tints of which contrast strikingly with the rich green of the pines, as they lift their tapering crests in all directions. Across the narrow pass rises the mountain, on one side of which the flashing cascade falls from its birthplace among the clouds, and on the other the Chimney Rock leans into sight. Farther up the gorge great hills stand, which have already drawn about them the blue robes of distance.

It is no wonder that we linger, loath to go down to the lower country which is now so near. But Eric says at last that we must go on if we wish to see the Pools. "A visit to them will take us a mile or two out of our way," he says, "and the house where I mean to spend the night is several miles beyond the gap."

On we go, therefore, and it is but a short distance farther before we pass between the castellated heights that form the natural gateway of this most grand of all approaches to our Eden of the Sky. One last glance up the gorge, already draped in purple and azure, then a sharp turn of the road, and Hickory-Nut Gap is crossed and left behind us.

It is with an absolute pang that we realize this.

"I feel inclined to turn round and go back," says Sylvia.

"Keep heart!" says Charley, in a tone of consolation. "I have entered into negotiations for a tract of land in Transylvania, where I mean to erect a hunting-lodge, and where any or all of the present company will be welcome."

"Are you in earnest?" asks Eric, skeptically. "I have heard nothing of such negotiations."

"Probably not," Charley serenely answers, "since they were conducted while you were at Cæsar's Head. I have found a place that I think will suit me exactly."

"Charley, you're a trump!" cries Rupert, enthusiastically. "I'll spend every vacation with you!"

"And, unless you object, I'll go shares in the purchase," says Eric. "I was thinking of such a place myself."

"What is to become of us, Aunt Markham?" demands Sylvia. "We shall never be able to command an escort for a watering-place again."

"But I thought you had abjured watering-places?" I observe.

"She abjured them with the saving clause, 'until I change my mind,'" Charley remarks.

Not far from the gap we turn to the right, ford the river, and follow a road which leads immediately along the foot of the mountains. On one side the latter rise, on the other lies a fertile valley. We skirt the hills, and reach presently a log-cabin, with its door overrun with vines, and its tiny garden full of gaudy flowers. A man so tall that he looks altogether out of proportion with his house comes out and bids us "drive straight ahead" if we want to find the Pools.

"But, if we drive farther, can we find any place to turn?" Eric asks—a very important question, since the road is of the narrowest possible description.

"Oh, yes, plenty of places," is the reassuring reply; so, despite a remonstrance from John, who would prefer to halt where he is, we drive on through some bars which Harrison has meanwhile let down.

"I wonder whar them places for turning is, Mass Eric?" says John, presently, as we jolt along a rough road with a mountain on one side and a steep declivity on the other.

"Not far ahead, I think," replies Eric. "Here's the stream—now you can turn."

"Let me out first," cries Aunt Markham, who has an aversion to narrow turns.

We all alight, and follow Eric up a hill-side-path by the side of the stream, which is a well-sized creek of crystal clearness. A more charming glen than the one in which we find ourselves it would be impossible to imagine. On each side the mountains rise sheer from the bed of the stream, while between these walls of green the water rushes downward in a succession of cascades, falling finally into three circular pools, the sides of which are worn to the smoothness of the most carefully-polished stone.

"That water must surely have a rotary motion," I say, "to have chiseled out such perfect wells."

"Certainly it has a rotary motion," answers Eric. "Throw a bough in, and you will see it drawn under, disappear for some time, and finally reappear on the opposite side of the pool, from which it will gradually drift into the current."

"The people here call that largest pool,

next the bank over yonder, bottomless," says Charley.

"Stuff!" says Eric. "But it is really forty or fifty feet deep by actual measurement."

"Not a nice place to go down in," says Sylvia, with a slight shudder. "Yet how lovely!"

Certainly the whole scene is lovely beyond all terms of praise or description. Limpid water, gray rocks, semi-tropical foliage—who can tire of these things in ever varied and picturesque combination?

"What a place for a painter!" says Sylvia; "better than many wilder ones which we have seen. The Saluda Gorge, for instance, is far grander, but this is full of the most romantic beauty."

"Come higher," says Charley, "and you will have a view of the upper falls."

We go above the cascade, which pours into the pools, and obtain a partial view of a higher and less accessible fall. Just here an enormous tree has been cut down, and forms a bridge across the stream. In the centre, immediately under the bridge, is a point of rock that the current does not cover, and to this Charley springs.

"There is a capital view of the upper fall from here," he says; "the only good view to be had.—Sylvia, do you think you could reach here?"

No! Sylvia essays to do so, and finds that she cannot, the intervening water being too wide and too deep.

"But I can come that far on the tree," she says, turning to climb the bank.

"If you do, you will surely fall!" Aunt Markham and I remonstrate.

"No, you won't, Sylvia!" cries Rupert, who has crossed. "It is very good walking if your head don't swim."

"My head never swims," asserts Sylvia, confidently.

She advances out on the trunk as she speaks. It is certainly wide enough to afford good footing, but the farther end does not rest very firmly against the opposite bank, and the consequence is that it shakes as she walks. This, added to the fact of her elevation (six feet, at least) above the stream, with a sweeping fall on each side, and swift-rushing water underneath, makes her, as she afterward confesses, suddenly and unaccountably giddy. She stops, and Charley, seeing

her change of color, springs into the water above which she has paused, and seizes the only thing within his reach—one of her feet!

"Sit down!" he says, imperatively. "You'll fall if you don't!"

She obeys instantly, dropping down on the log with a slight gasp.

"I—don't know what makes me so silly!" she says. "And *how* am I to get back?"

"Easily enough," he answers. "Bend down and put your hands on my shoulders—that is it!"

As soon as she bends within his reach he lifts her, staggering back a little under her weight—for it is only in novels that muscular heroes can bear substantial heroines as if they were feathers—but carries her safely through the water to the dry rock. There he deposits her, with a laugh.

"Set that against the Bridal-Veil Fall!" he says.

Sylvia on her part lifts her hand at once to her head.

"My hat!" she says. "I've lost it!"

"Yonder it goes!" cries Rupert, with unfeeling gayety. "Sailing down-stream as fast as it can to the pools."

We all turn just in time to see the hat whirled over the ledge of rock, and, after bobbing about for a minute or two in the largest pool, finally disappear.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" says Sylvia. "I have worn that hat all over the mountains, and I wanted to take it home. How provoking to think of losing it here, on *this* side of the Blue Ridge!"

"Wait a bit," says Charley; "you shall have it yet!"

He springs up the bank, darts lightly over the fallen tree, and we watch him making his way through the dense undergrowth which lines the opposite bank until he reaches the pool. There he provides himself with a long, crooked stick and waits.

"Now," says Eric, "when that hat reappears he is going to fish for it, and ten to one he'll tumble into the pool himself."

"Oh, he must not do that!" cries Sylvia, alarmed. "The hat is not worth any risk—in fact, I don't care about it at all. Of course, it is utterly ruined. Charley!" (elevating her voice), "O Charley! *please* come away! Let the hat alone!"

But Charley is obstinate. He means to capture that hat, and, when it reappears a

minute later, he at once begins to chase it with his stick. Sylvia watches him in great anxiety, as, with one arm around a tree to steady himself, he leans far over the pool and fishes indefatigably.

"I *know* he will fall!" she says. "It is exactly the way he did at Lover's Retreat."

"Don't distress yourself," says Eric. "If he falls, I will go down and fish for *him*."

"He's got it on the stick," says Rupert. "Now he's drawn it out. Look, Sylvia!"

Sylvia is looking. Charley waves the hat triumphantly, then turns and makes his way up the bank, crosses the tree, and displays the dripping prize to its owner. Luckily, it is merely a felt hat, with no other trimming than a band of ribbon. Therefore, when dry, it will not be much the worse for its wetting, and its owner regards it with pride and complacency.

"It has been down to the bottom of the bottomless pool!" she says. "What an adventure for it—and what a *souvenir* for me! Thank you, Charley, for restoring it to me—but what if you had fallen in yourself?"

"Should you have cared?" asks Charley. "By the law of reprisal, I ought to have a ducking to pay for yours at the Bridal—"

"Why do you harp on that?" she interrupts, impatiently. "It was not your fault—I said *that* at the time."

"It was my fault for trying to force an answer which you did not care to give," says Charley, "and you served me exactly right when you gave it as you did."

Mem.: These two are on the rocks by the fallen tree alone; the others have gone down to the pools, and only I—who lingered on the hillside to gather some ferns—overhear this conversation.

"You shall not blame yourself even for that," says Sylvia. "I deserved all I got for being so—so contrary and provoking. A woman might at least have the grace to tell the truth when she is asked for it."

"She may be tender-hearted about telling it, if it should chance to be an unpleasant truth," says Charley. "Yet it is best to give a victim the *coup de grace*—as you gave it to me."

"I think you are very unkind to attach importance to any pettish speech I may have made at such a time as that," she answers,

stooping to gather a flower from a crevice of the rock.

"What!" says Charley. "Not attach importance to such a forcible, downright 'No?' By Jove! it would be an odd fellow who *didn't*!"

Silence follows this. Sylvia has gone as far as she can go—has said all that a woman can say. She ends the pause by rising and extending her hand for the hat which he is still carrying.

"If you wish to abide by it I am quite willing for you to do so," she says, with the coldness of pride in her voice.

"If I wish to abide by it!" repeats Charley, taking the hand, while the hat drops unheeded, and narrowly escapes floating off down-stream again. "Do you think it likely I wish to do so—after all these years? Sylvia, you know that I love you—that I shall love you till I die—but if you are only drawing me back for your amusement, for God's sake, let me abide by that 'No!'"

The earnestness of this appeal—earnestness so unlike Charley that it startled even me among the ferns—touches Sylvia. She extends her other hand—the soft, gray eyes look at him beseechingly.

"Don't talk like that, Charley!" she says. "You make me sorer than ever that I uttered that foolish word. I never meant it. How could I mean it when I love you with all my heart? Is that enough?"

Enough! One might have been pardoned for thinking so who saw him take her into his arms, and then—ashamed of playing the spy—I go down the hillside and leave them together.

"Look back!" says Eric, an hour later. "The Blue Ridge is behind you."

We turn with one accord and look back as he directs. The grand, dark-blue heights stand behind us, fold upon fold, peak overlooking peak, knob rising beyond knob, the great crest of the famous Bald in the distance, Harris's Pinnacle near at hand, towering needle-like in its eminence. And behind these splendid masses the sun is sinking in clouds of ruby and gold, while the tender young moon gazes down from the fleecy sapphire of the upper heaven.

And so we bid farewell to the Land of the Sky.

THE END.

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